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AUSTRALIA

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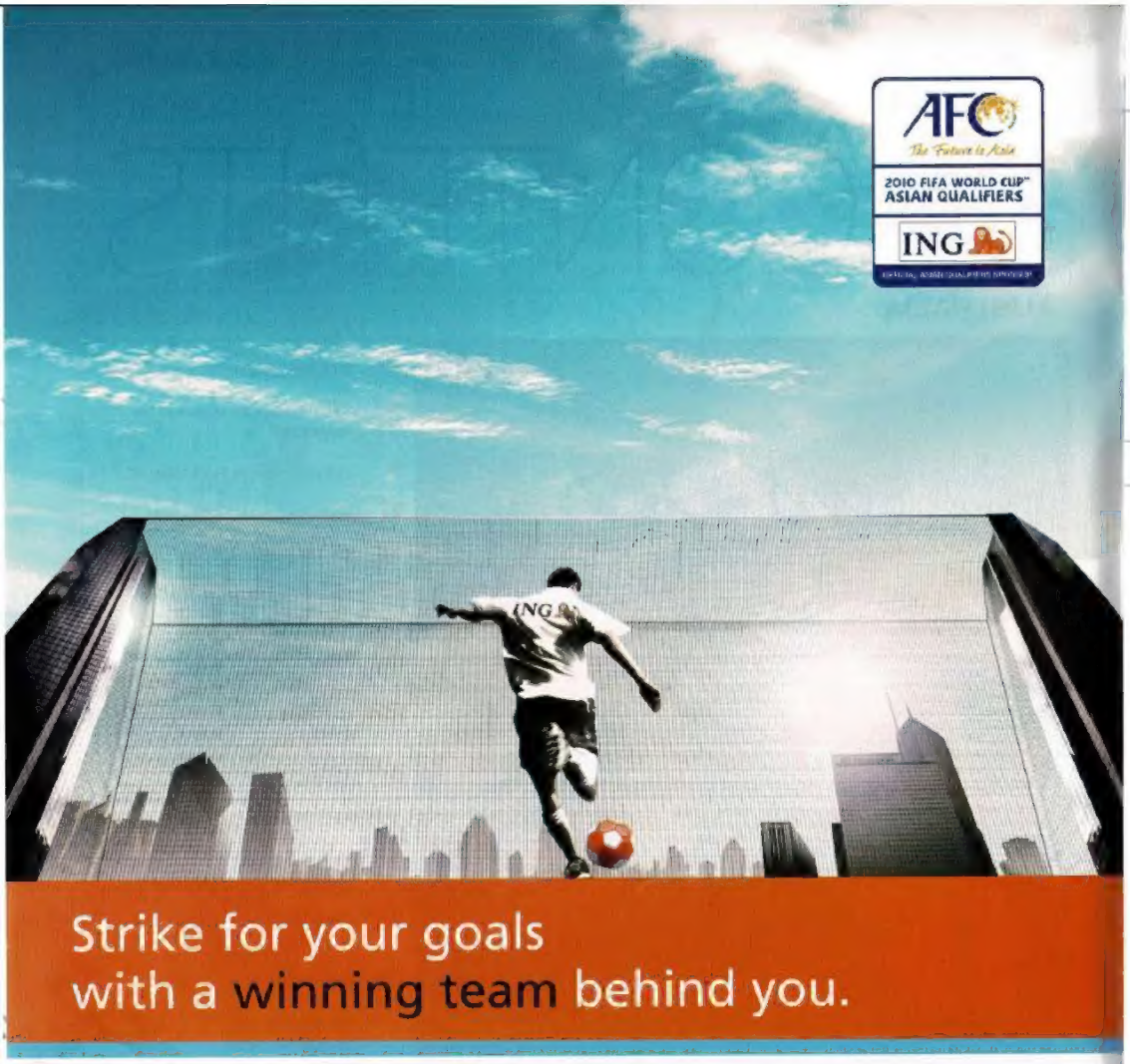
AUSTRALIA

CONTENTS

Australia v Bahrain 10 June 2009

5 FIFA President Mr Joseph S. Blatter
7 AFC President Mr Mohamed bin Hammam
9 FFA Chairman Mr Frank Lowy AC
11 NSW Premier Mr Nathan Rees
12 **On The Ball** News Round-Up
16 **Round Review** AFC World Cup Qualifiers
18 **Keys to Qualification** 10 turning points on the road to South Africa
28 **Red Alert** A look at Bahrain and its football
34 Tonight's line-ups
36 Meet the Socceroos
44 **Hunter Heritage** Newcastle and the Hunter football history
50 **Generations** Tony Popovic and Matt Spiranovic
53 **My First Time** Alex Brosque
54 **Golden Moment** John Aloisi
57 **Up Next** Japan
58 **Match Schedule** FIFA World Cup round four qualifiers
61 Half-time Quiz
63 Fan Focus
66 Number Crunch



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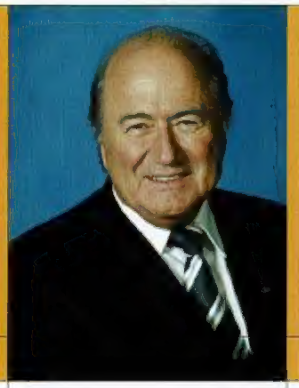

FIFA President Joseph S. Blatter

Welcome to the final round of the Asian qualifiers for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the AFC for its organisation of the matches, but also to the authorities, sponsors, numerous volunteers and fans who are supporting these qualifiers, which are very important throughout Asia.

As you can see, Asian football has progressed rapidly in the last few years. I congratulate the teams that have qualified for the final round. I hope that they play their best football and uphold the spirit of fair play while aiming to qualify for the much-coveted FIFA World Cup.

Every team wants to win on the pitch, qualify and grab their ticket for South Africa. However, the most important thing is to give your all.

I kindly ask all sportsmen, officials and fans to remember that promoting sportsmanship is synonymous with promoting ethical values, and in this respect, every player, every referee and every fan can lead by example.

Players and supporters, play to win and enjoy yourselves, but accept defeat with dignity - that is the lesson football teaches us every single day. To respect the laws of the game, your opponents, team members, referees and spectators is to respect yourself.

The winners of this final round will have every reason to celebrate, as they will be taking part in an absolutely exceptional World Cup. South African hearts and minds are full of excited anticipation ahead of football's greatest tournament and we can sense the immense enthusiasm across the entire nation whenever conversation invariably turns to the FIFA World Cup.

We are convinced that the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ will be a tournament the likes of which the world has never seen before and we are looking forward to working together with you to achieve this goal.

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Joseph S. Blatter
FIFA PRESIDENT

> "South African hearts and minds are full of excited anticipation ahead of football's greatest tournament"

FIFA

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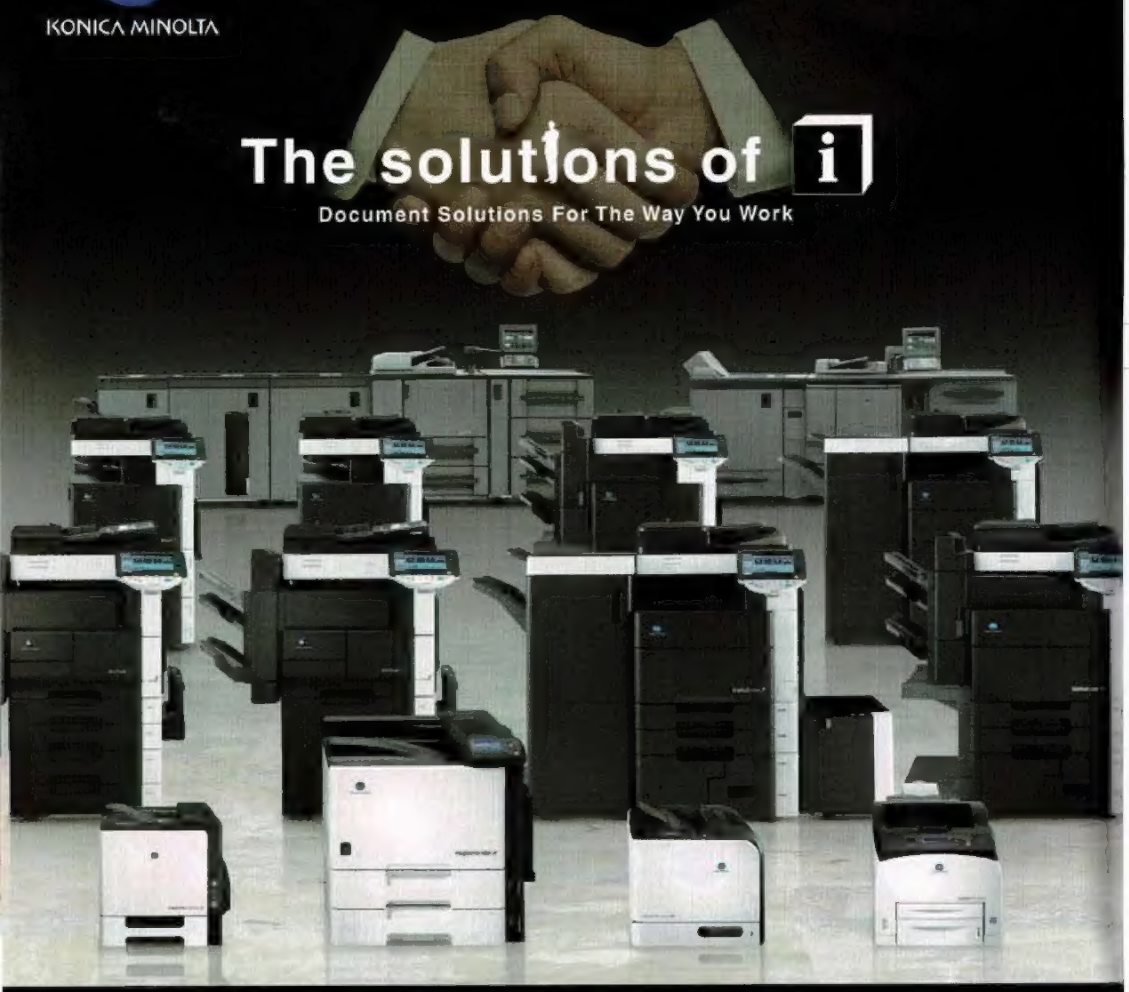

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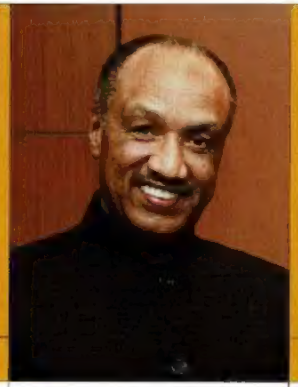
Thrilling games ahead



AFC President Mohamed bin Hammam

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the final round of the Asian qualifiers for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

The excitement is palpable as the players get ready to give their best in a bid to reach the ultimate destination - the FIFA World Cup.

If the results in the third round of qualifiers are anything to go by, the final round is all set to be a thrilling affair. We saw Asian champions Iraq's fairytale run ended even as a gritty DPR Korea staked their claim for an automatic qualifying slot with an impressive show.

Like DPR Korea, Qatar and the UAE have also emerged from the shadows of the continental heavyweights like Japan, Saudi Arabia or Korea Republic, who can no longer take their qualification for granted.

With only four direct qualification spots and 10 teams in the fray, only those who punch their tickets to South Africa will be celebrating while others will be left to rue the ignominy of defeat.

The stage is set for an interesting battle, but I would like to ask every player, official and referee, to show respect towards each other at all times because fair play is the only way a football competition can truly become extraordinary.

In their bid to earn a ticket to South Africa, they should keep in mind the importance of sportsmanship which will help them stand out even in defeat.

I would like to remind all the teams that football is not just about winning or losing but to enjoy the 'beautiful game' as it could well be the dawn of a new era for Asian football.

I wish you all a very successful tournament and hope to see you all participating again in future competitions.

The Future is Asia.

Mohamed bin Hammam
AFC PRESIDENT

> "The excitement is palpable as the players get ready to give their best in a bid to reach the ultimate destination - the FIFA World Cup"

AFC
The Future is Asia

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Welcome Bahrain

FFA Chairman Frank Lowy AC

Tonight, I am delighted to welcome to Australia our guests from the Bahrain Football Association and the Bahrain national team.

The journey to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa is drawing to a close, with only one more game to be played next week.

At the time of writing this, the Socceroos have not yet played their match against Qatar in Doha so while we are tantalisingly close to qualifying for South Africa – we are not there yet. Regardless of that result, tonight's game is important to us and our opponents.

I know that coach Pim Verbeek and the Socceroos would like to finish the fourth stage of qualification with as strong a record as possible and, equally, Bahrain also has something to prove. They are still in contention for a place at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, and the last time our two teams met (in Manama in November 2008), Mark Bresciano scored a last minute goal to give Australia the three points.

Tonight is also the beginning of a very big week for football – what we term "Super June".

Tomorrow evening, we recognise and reward the achievements of outstanding contribution in the past year from grassroots teams through to the Socceroos at the inaugural Australian Football Awards. It is the "football family" celebrating together.

On Sunday, we launch our bid for the 2018-2022 FIFA World Cup. It is our moment to say to the world that this is what we have to offer in hosting the greatest show on earth. We may not be the oldest football nation in the world, but we are passionate about our sport and our country. We believe that with every Australian, including all governments, showing their support for our bid, we can win this. We can bring the world to Australia – and give Australia a legacy for generations to come.

Next Wednesday, in Melbourne, we host our traditional rivals Japan in the final game of this round of qualification for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

I want to thank the football fans of Sydney for your wonderful and continuing commitment and support for the Socceroos and for football. Thank you also to all our partners for their support, including for tonight's game.

My best wishes to both teams for what I am sure will be a competitive and enjoyable match for all.

Frank Lowy AC
CHAIRMAN
FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

> "Tonight is the beginning of a very big week for football – what we term 'Super June'"

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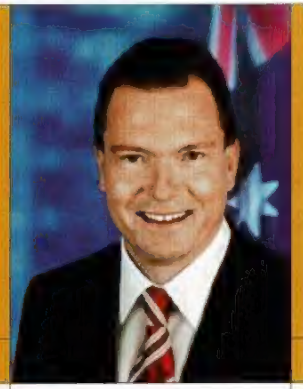

It is a pleasure to welcome the national teams of Australia and Bahrain to Sydney for tonight's 2010 FIFA World Cup final round qualifier at Stadium Australia.

There can be no better place to watch our Socceroos than in Sydney – Australia's global city and the nation's undisputed football capital. Tonight's match is an opportunity for fans to celebrate with our team as they continue on their path to South Africa 2010.

The FIFA World Cup is not only the pinnacle of sport – it's an event without peer. That is why the NSW Government is a strong supporter of Football Federation Australia's bid to secure the FIFA World Cup finals for Australia in 2018 or 2022.

Sydney is a natural home for landmark global events – from the Olympics in 2000, the Rugby World Cup in 2003 and World Youth Day in 2008. With this track record we are confident we can play a significant part in delivering an outstanding FIFA World Cup for Australia.

I hope all fans tonight enjoy the match as our Socceroos maintain their momentum on the road to South Africa 2010.

Nathan Rees

NSW PREMIER

"The NSW Government is a strong supporter of FFA's candidature to secure the FIFA World Cup Finals"

ON THE BALL

A quick round-up of the latest happenings in Aussie football

New National Football Curriculum unveiled

Football Federation Australia has announced another landmark initiative with the unveiling of a new National Football Curriculum (NFC) for 6-19-year-olds which aims to improve the long-term skill level, quality and performance of Australia's top players and teams.

"The National Football Curriculum is the next important stage of the Talent Identification Development Review and the National Football Development Plan," said FFA CEO, Ben Buckley.

"It sets the blueprint for the quality and style of Australian football for the future and aims to significantly improve our skill levels. It is the first time we have had a national curriculum which sets the basis for the development of all young players and coaches, whether at community or elite level.

"The key objective is to create a talented player development program that emphasises skill and sustains international success for generations to come, as well as a coach development system that produces quality coaches who are able to implement the curriculum and realise similar goals."

The NFC has been developed by researching best practice in talent development and identification in football and other sports and tailoring it to football in Australia.

The evidence-based curriculum has been developed by FFA's National Technical Director, Han Berger, following on from preliminary work by the previous National Technical Director, Rob Baan.

Berger will oversee implementation of the NFC.

"It recognises two streams of development," Berger said. "The first is for talented players who aim to play at the highest level possible, and the second is for community players who just want to play the game and enjoy the sport."

Right: Han Berger, FFA National Technical Director

KEY POINTS OF THE NFC

- **The approach is "game-related" rather than "isolated"**, which impacts all training and exercises with an emphasis on skill development and a pro-active style of playing that corresponds with the Australian competitive psyche and mandating of the 1-4-3-3 formation for all FFA controlled development teams (such as Joeys, Young Matildas) as the best developmental model.
- **Integration and mutual dependency of physical conditioning** with football training so that they are not separated.
- **Each State/Territory will appoint a Technical Director**, funded under the FFA's new Member Federation Charter, with the State Technical Director reporting to the National Technical Director.
- **Coach Education Programs will be reviewed** to reflect the NFC.
- **Specific levels of coaching qualification will be required** for all higher level coaching positions (National Team, A-League, W-League, National Youth League, Institute and State technical Directors).
- **By 2010 each State/Territory will need to appoint at least one 'Skill Acquisition Trainer'** whose role will be to ensure that skill development programs for talented players are universally implemented.
- **Football clubs, schools and academies will be accredited and rated.** Adoption of the Curriculum will be a prerequisite to accreditation and rating.

Australia-Turkey series hailed

Football Federation Australia (FFA) CEO, Ben Buckley has hailed the inaugural Anzac Day Australia-Turkey friendly matches a success.

While the Australian U/17 team (the Joeys) lost the two matches, both games in Canakkale were well supported and played in great spirit, befitting the Anzac tradition.

The Joeys attended the Australian Service at Lone Pine Cemetery following their two games.

Around 1,000 fans watched each of the matches with the games drawing a carnival-like atmosphere, while the first match was attended by Australian and Turkish government officials, including Australia's Foreign Minister Stephen Smith and NSW Premier Nathan Rees.

Buckley said the ultimate goal was to hold a senior series around the time and, with the AFL and NRL already hosting traditional Anzac Day fixtures, he was confident football could join those codes in forging a tradition.

"In time if we were to play a Socceroos match here in Turkey or in Australia around Anzac Day, I'm confident they would both be sell out matches," said Buckley.

"It's also given us an opportunity to build relationships at different levels and I have been really delighted with the support for Australia's bid for the 2018 or 2022 FIFA World Cup that we have received from Turkish football officials, media and fans."

YOUNG MATILDAS' GOAL-FEST

Hat-tricks from Nicole Sykes and Angela Fimmano helped the Young Matildas to an emphatic 7-0 win against Finland on their recent Italian tour.

Nicola Bolger opened the scoring after 12 minutes and from that point on, it was one-way traffic.

Our girls followed that up with a convincing 3-0 win over Germany. An own goal had given Australia a 1-0 half-time lead and it was extended late in the game with goals from Kyah Simon and Bolger.

Meanwhile, the Young Socceroos placed third at the Terborg Toernooi in the Netherlands after defeating Liverpool FC 4-2 on penalties in their play-off match. The Young Socceroos were defeated 1-0 by Valencia in their opening match, but beat Feyenoord 2-0, drew 0-0 with Atletico Miniero and enjoyed a 2-0 victory over De Graafschap on their way to third spot.

Adding to the successful campaign, Young Socceroo Aaron Mooy was also named the player of the tournament.

Indigenous program off and running

The first of the Football Federation Australia Indigenous Football Development Program visits have been held in Moree, NSW and Launceston/Hobart in Tasmania and have proven to be a huge success.

The new initiative by the FFA to steer more Indigenous players towards a career in football kicked off in Moree where over 100 players came along, while the Launceston/Hobart events saw a number of trial players attend for selection in the Indigenous Football Festival tournament that will be held in Townsville later this year.

Darrel Smith, coach for the NSW U/16 girls' regional team, was accompanied by Indigenous Football Program Mentors, Matilda and Central Coast Mariners W-League star Kyah Simon and Futsalroos captain Lachlan Wright.

The visit coincided with a trial for the NSW U/16 girls' regional team. Players from Mungindi, Walgett, Tamworth and Armidale were all involved. The day included a visit to the Moree East Public School where Kyah and Lachlan took a skills session.

Meanwhile in Tasmania, over 30 children were involved in an Indigenous Football Festival participation session in Launceston and Hobart.

These sessions were coordinated and conducted by Football Federation Tasmania Game Development Staff.

INDIGENOUS FOOTBALL PROGRAM

Kyah Simon, one of the Indigenous football mentors

AUSSIES WIN SILVER

The Australian Paralympic team has had to settle for the silver medal at the Oceania Paralympic Championships in Darwin after going down 2-0 to England in the 7-a-side grand final at Marrara Sports Stadium.

England midfielder Michael Wilson found the back of the net in the fifth minute to give his side an ideal start before Richard Fox snuck through on the brink of half-time to double the advantage.

Australia fought desperately in the stifling conditions to get back into the contest in the second stanza, but coach Paul Brown was left to rue the first-half performance which saw the game slip.

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ROUND FOUR

THE STORY SO FAR...

It's been an exciting campaign in both AFC groups as we head into the last stages of qualification for the FIFA World Cup WORDS Aidan Ormond

GROUP A

RESULTS TO DATE

MATCH DAY 1	
BAHRAIN	2
JAPAN	3
QATAR	3
UZBEKISTAN	0
MATCH DAY 2	
UZBEKISTAN	0
AUSTRALIA	1
QATAR	1
BAHRAIN	1
MATCH DAY 3	
AUSTRALIA	4
QATAR	0
JAPAN	1
UZBEKISTAN	1
MATCH DAY 4	
QATAR	0
JAPAN	3
BAHRAIN	0
AUSTRALIA	1
MATCH DAY 5	
UZBEKISTAN	0
BAHRAIN	1
JAPAN	0
AUSTRALIA	0
MATCH DAY 6	
JAPAN	1
BAHRAIN	0
UZBEKISTAN	4
QATAR	0
MATCH DAY 7	
BAHRAIN	1
QATAR	0
AUSTRALIA	2
UZBEKISTAN	0

Match Day 8
Played June 6
*Fill in the results
Qatar v Australia
Uzbekistan v Japan

AUSTRALIA

The on-song Socceroos' most recent test was a tricky home tie against Uzbekistan. With the Uzbeks defeating Qatar days earlier, their confidence was high but the long journey to Sydney was always going to be a challenge – particularly as the Socceroos had been in camp for a week in Sydney.

A solid 2-0 victory to the home side (Kennedy, Kewell) ensured the Australians went back to the top of the group held briefly by Japan courtesy of their win over Bahrain.

Australia has accumulated points with machine-like efficiency in Group A. Starting with a good 1-0 win in Tashkent, a 4-0 victory over Qatar in Brisbane and a get-out-of-jail 1-0 triumph in Manama. And prior to the Uzbek game in Sydney, a crucial 0-0 draw in Yokohama.

Heading into Super June, unbeaten with five clean sheets, eight goals and 13 points, you cannot ask for more than that.

JAPAN

In March, Japan squeezed past Bahrain 1-0 in Saitama thanks to a flash of Shunsuke Nakamura trickery. The three points kept the chasing pack at bay and Japan firmly in the group's top two.

Like Australia, the Blue Samurai are unbeaten heading into June but home draws against the Socceroos and Uzbekistan has disappointed their fans.

Even a 3-2 win in Bahrain was troubling, with the Japanese conceding two late goals to almost throw away the three points. Their best result was a 3-0 win in Qatar.

BAHRAIN

Tonight's opponent took three crucial points against Qatar on April 1. The 1-0 win courtesy of Faouzi Aaish's strike cemented Al-Ahmar's spot as third in the group on seven points.

Days earlier, Bahrain left Japan on the wrong end of a 1-0 loss so the win was crucial in keeping up their chances of finishing third and a third-place play-off with Group B.

Bahrain's best result was in February with a stunning 1-0 win in Tashkent. A 94th-minute winner handing them a valuable 1-0 win.

Uzbekistan star midfielder Server Djeparov

UZBEKISTAN

Like Qatar, the Uzbeks cannot qualify automatically as one of the top two sides in the group. Hopes were raised briefly on March 28 when Farhod Tadjiev nabbed a hat-trick in a 4-0 demolition of Qatar in Tashkent on match day six.

But the loss to Australia a few days later on the back of a heart-breaking home loss to Bahrain in February effectively dashed their top two hopes.

QATAR

A disastrous last two match days in March and April consigned Bruno Metsu's side to bottom place and just four points. A thumping 4-0 loss to Uzbekistan on March 28 was followed by a defeat to neighbours Bahrain in Manama on April 1.

The Qataris got off to a flyer in 2008 with a 3-0 win over Uzbekistan in Doha and a draw at home with Bahrain. However, since then, it's all gone pear-shaped for the Maroons. Finishing third is now their only hope of qualification.

STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
AUSTRALIA	5	4	1	0	8	0	8	13
JAPAN	5	3	2	0	8	3	5	11
BAHRAIN	6	2	1	3	5	6	-1	7
UZBEKISTAN	6	1	1	4	5	8	-3	4
QATAR	6	1	1	4	4	13	-9	4

*After March/April 2009 matches

Japan has continued to impress in the group stages

Qatar's Sebastian Quintana

GROUP B

RESULTS TO DATE

MATCH DAY 1	
SAUDI ARABIA	1
IRAN	1
UAE	1
DPR KOREA	2
MATCH DAY 2	
DPR KOREA	1
KOREA REP	1
UAE	1
SAUDI ARABIA	2
MATCH DAY 3	
KOREA REP	4
UAE	1
IRAN	2
DPR KOREA	1
MATCH DAY 4	
UAE	1
IRAN	1
SAUDI ARABIA	0
KOREA REP	2
MATCH DAY 5	
DPR KOREA	1
SAUDI ARABIA	0
IRAN	1
KOREA REP	1
MATCH DAY 6	
IRAN	1
SAUDI ARABIA	2
DPR KOREA	2
UAE	0
MATCH DAY 7	
KOREA REP	1
DPR KOREA	0
SAUDI ARABIA	3
UAE	2

Match Day 8
Played June 6
*Fill in the results
UAE v Korea Rep
DPR Korea v Iran

KOREA REPUBLIC

In a highly anticipated top two group clash, Korea Republic defeated DPR Korea 1-0 in Seoul on April 1 to maintain their slender lead at the top of the group.

Unbeaten in the group, they drew with DPR Korea in neutral Shanghai to kick off their campaign before slamming UAE 4-1 in Seoul. A 2-0 win away to Saudi Arabia and a 1-1 result in Tehran last February rounds out a strong campaign.

DPR KOREA

That 1-0 loss in Seoul last April came on the back of a comfortable 2-0 win over UAE at the Kim Il Sung Stadium in Pyongyang on March 28.

Starting the group with a confidence-building three points in the UAE and a draw in neutral Shanghai against Korea Republic, DPR Korea's only other loss came in Iran with a 2-1 reversal.

A 1-0 win against Saudi Arabia was vital in holding off the strong finishing Saudis who also sit on 10 points heading into June.

SAUDI ARABIA

The Saudis are coming home with a wet sail after excellent match days six and seven, which have rejuvenated a faltering campaign.

A stunning 2-1 victory in Iran on March 28 was backed up by an expected three points over UAE at home days later.

Six points from two games and suddenly the "Sons of the Desert" – accustomed to qualifying for FIFA World Cups – are breathing down the necks of DPR Korea in second also on 10 points. After a disappointing campaign up until March with just one win to their names, the Saudis have kick-started their FIFA World Cup hopes.

Park Chu-Young is a key man for Korea Republic

IRAN

To be fair, it's been a chaotic campaign for this regional heavyweight. A lack of continuity under three different coaches has been reflected in the indifferent results with a 1-3-1 win-draw-loss ratio heading into June.

Iran's only victory was a 2-1 home win over DPR Korea but the loss to the Saudis at home on March 28 was a real low-point. The defeat resulted in the departure of coach and former playing great Ali Daei.

UAE

It's back to the drawing board for the UAE. With just one point from six games they can't even finish in third. It's all over for them.

Losses to Saudi Arabia (3-2) and DPR Korea (2-0) on match days six and seven last March and April crushed any lingering hopes of at least a third spot finish.

Starting the group with consecutive 2-1 home losses these were followed by a 4-1 thrashing in Seoul. UAE's first and only point so far came in a 1-1 draw at home to Iran.

STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
KOREA REPUBLIC	5	3	2	0	9	3	6	11
DPR KOREA	6	3	1	2	7	5	2	10
SAUDI ARABIA	6	3	1	2	8	8	0	10
IRAN	5	1	3	1	6	6	0	6
UAE	6	0	1	5	6	14	-8	1

*After March/April 2009 matches

UAE have under-achieved in this group stage

DPR Korea have been a surprise packet

TURNING POINTS

on the road to South Africa

We look back at some of the turning points and key moments which have defined Australia's FIFA World Cup campaign over the last 18 months WORDS **Aidan Ormond**

THE SOCCEROOS' QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa has been played in two parts. The first section was the Asian Football Confederation round three qualifiers which kicked off for Australia in February 2008.

Over the next six months the group pitted Australia against Iraq, China and Qatar in their first ever AFC round of FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

After Australia progressed from this stage, the Socceroos moved into the fourth and final round of FIFA qualifiers which began in September last year. Australia was grouped with Qatar again, Uzbekistan, Bahrain and Japan.

As we move into June, we look back at some of the campaign's defining moments and the major turning points in a rollercoaster 18 months.

After traversing Asia - from Kunming in China, to Dubai and Doha, Tashkent and Manama and Yokohama - the Socceroos are now in the final month of the last group stage.

Looking ahead, what will June bring for the Socceroos? Qatar away in the heat of Doha on June 6 could cement qualification for the FIFA 2010 World Cup.

If not, there's a tough test against Bahrain in Sydney tonight followed closely by June 17's marquee clash with Japan in Melbourne.

Whatever happens, it should be another Super June for our Socceroos...

1 Craig Moore's courageous return

If there was one man who epitomised the spirit of the Socceroos, it's Craig Moore. He's provided Australia's defence with clear and calm authority in some hothouse atmospheres.

But more than that, his decision to continue playing after receiving shock news about his health (he was diagnosed with testicular cancer late last year and underwent critical surgery to stem the disease), showed what playing football - and the Socceroos - means to this humble, yet inspiring character.

A dignified, low-profile exit was how Moore opted to play his last game for the national team. It was the first game of the campaign against Qatar in Melbourne in February 2008. But nine months later the Brisbane Roar defender was persuaded to don the national shirt once more in his hometown of Brisbane. It was like he'd never left.

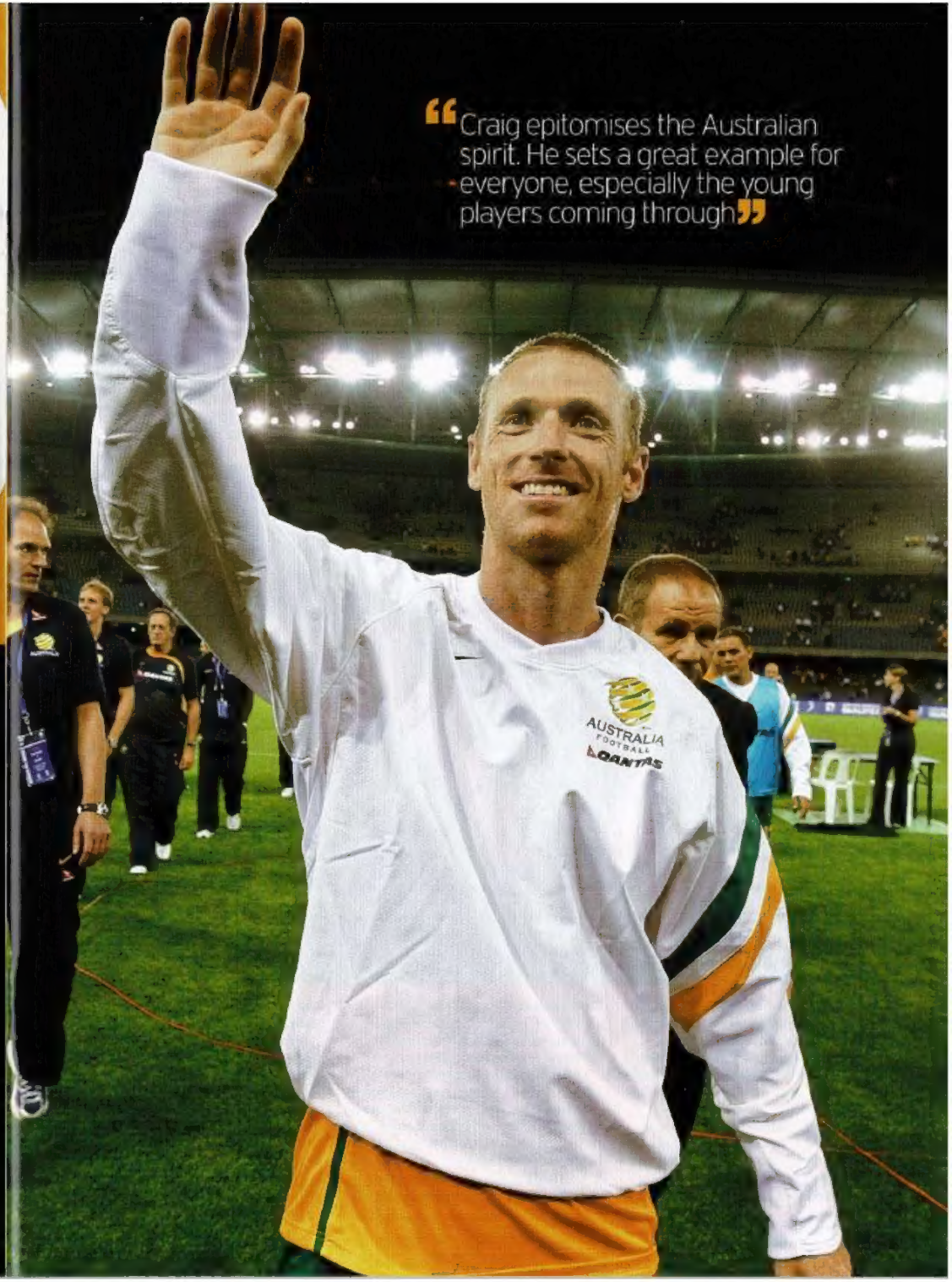
And after missing the Bahrain game in November due to his health situation, the former Glasgow Ranger returned for the marquee clash of the group against Japan in Yokohama last February.

In this classic top-two battle and against a tidal wave of blue shirts, "Moorey" remained a rock alongside Lucas Neill in repelling the dangerous Japanese onslaught.

"He has a massive effect on the team. He has a wealth of experience with what he has been through and what he has done throughout his career," says Socceroo teammate and wingback Luke Wilkshire.

It's this courage under fire and bravery as a person that so endears Moore to the fans and his teammates. "He optimises the Australian players," adds Wilkshire. "He sets a great example for everyone, especially the young players coming through. On the field, off the field, in and around the team, he plays a huge part."

Moore's spirit has mirrored the Socceroos' determination to succeed on the road to South Africa 2010.



10 TURNING POINTS on the road to South Africa

2 Bresciano's Bahrain stunner

How important was Bresciano's last-minute winner in Bahrain? A draw would have placed the Socceroos on seven points with Japan breathing down their necks ahead of the sides' clash in Tokyo two months later.

But three points instead of one gave Australia a critical buffer - and confidence - going into 2009 and the test in Tokyo.

The vital strike came with the scores locked at 0-0. After Schwarzer's 92nd-minute goal kick made it to well inside the Bahrain half, it wasn't dealt with convincingly by Bahrain's central defenders and a skewed attempted clearance fell invitingly for an on-rushing Bresciano.

Suddenly, the attacking midfielder was bearing down on the Bahrain goal with two out-of-position defenders desperately trying to reach him. On the bumpy surface at the National Stadium in Manama, the Italy-based star coolly kept possession and set himself up for a shot just inside the box.

For a second, it appeared that Bresciano had hesitated too long but the wily Palermo star steadied, shielded the ball from the trailing leg of a defender then smashed it beautifully through the keeper's outstretched reach and into the net.

It was a goal of immense importance at a critical stage of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers. A 100% record from three games sent out a powerful message to the rest of the confederation - and gave the green and gold belief that automatic qualification as a top two nation was a real possibility.

3 Schwarzer averts China crisis in Kunming

With just minutes left of the clash in Kunming, China last March 2008, Mark Schwarzer dashed out of his penalty box and took down a Chinese striker.

The referee pointed to the spot Aussie hearts dropped. At 0-0 a goal to China so late would have almost certainly handed a physical Chinese side the points against a weakened Socceroo line-up playing in unfamiliar high altitude.

But, as teams around the world have often discovered, Schwarzer is a master in these situations. He coolly saved Shao Jiayi's spot kick and the Aussies hung on to leave Kunming with a valuable point as the man himself explains.

"For 90 minutes of the game, barring two really good chances to score which we didn't take, we really played our game plan to a tee," the Socceroo keeper recalls.

"We frustrated China and had control of the match, then we conceded a silly penalty right at the end. I still think it was a harsh decision but that's how it goes.

"After the penalty was given, I thought, 'I've given it away here. I've messed it up, I've messed up a great opportunity to come away with a great result away.

"I was just lucky that I was able to make amends. I didn't make a decision to go one way or another, I just tried to stay on my feet for as long as possible and react to his shot.

"I saved it with my legs as I dived a bit further than I actually needed to, I got a little bit of luck as well as it rebounded off my legs and came straight into my arms. I'm really glad as we had a lot of fan support there for that game."

4 Schwarzer's Tokyo heroics

The Socceroos were under the hammer. Playing Japan in Tokyo was always going to be a huge challenge, particularly considering some Socceroos would only arrive in the Japanese capital just 36 hours before kick-off.

The Japanese, with their array of attacking talent, were always going to threaten, and threaten they did. The temperature may have been cool in Yokohama but the pressure on the Aussie goal was white hot.

The Aussie midfielders worked their socks off denying space, getting tackles in and keeping the central corridor protected from the varied threats of Shunsuke Nakamura, Yasuhito Endo and Keiji Tamada.

And as the game edged into an exciting final 30 minutes, the Japanese ramped up the pressure as the tiring Aussies gifted more turnovers which began to cost Australia valuable possession and time.

Then the moment that had all Socceroo fans holding their collective breath. The skilful Endo was found free in space by Atsuto Uchida on the edge of the Socceroo box right in front of goal. This was the moment for Japan to press home their advantage but the Gamba Osaka man's smashing drive was palmed over brilliantly by Schwarzer.

Thanks to Schwarzy's heroics, there was no way past. The Fulham 'keeper proved the difference as Australia hung on for yet another pivotal and crucial point on the road to South Africa.

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10 TURNING POINTS on the road to South Africa

5 Josh Kennedy's emergence as potent Socceroo strike weapon

Injury concerns to spearhead Mark Viduka have given Josh Kennedy a chance to stake his claim to the Socceroos' central striking position, and the tall striker has taken the chance with both feet (and head of course).

Kennedy was drafted in for Pim Verbeek's first FIFA World Cup qualifier against Qatar in February 2008. And it was the Germany based hitman's presence up front that helped batter the visitor's defensive walls.

The Socceroos found themselves three goals up at half-time thanks to Tim Cahill, Mark Bresciano and the opening goal of the night – and the campaign – to the man Socceroo fans call "Jesus".

From wide right, Brett Emerton powered into space before planting an inch-perfect cross onto the head of the former U/17 international, and his huge frame leapt high to head home. It was to be a regular sight as the campaign kicked into gear.

In Australia's opening match, Kennedy had made a powerful statement about his intent to lead the line during the campaign.

> "Kennedy had made a powerful statement about his intent to lead the line"

The Victorian continued his goal-scoring with another headed effort against Qatar in Brisbane later in 2008. And this year, it was the head of Kennedy which again made the difference as he broke the dead ock against Uzbekistan in Sydney to help Australia to three more valuable points.

And it's not just the goals – it's the way that Kennedy has intelligently linked up with the midfield as well as caused trouble with his height in the box that has impressed.

After such an eye catching cameo at Germany 2006, Kennedy has shown Pim Verbeek that he won't let us down as the number one striker in the absence of the one and only "Dukes".

His emergence has been a hugely welcome and timely boon for the Socceroos on the road to South Africa. Can Kennedy net tonight?

TURNING POINTS
on the road to South Africa

6 Captain Kewell's classy return

With injury ruling him out of the earlier FIFA World Cup qualifiers in 2008, Kewell returned to the Socceroo line-up for the game against Iraq in Brisbane on June 1.

Handed the armband in the absence of Lucas Neill, Kewell announced he was back with a performance that spoke volumes for his commitment and importance to the green and gold.

Kewell was at the heart of everything and found the net early in the second half with a bullet header. His substitution later in the game was greeted with rapturous applause.

It signalled that Kewell was back. He backed that up with good games in Dubai against Iraq and in Doha against Qatar – where he scored in the 3-1 win and helped set up Brett Emerton's second. What's more, he leads the Aussies magnificently taking to the skipper's role with a natural ease.

And in the final round of FIFA World Cup qualifiers this year, Kewell kept his cool to slot home a spot kick, Australia's second goal against Uzbekistan last April, to wrap up the three points.

After a wretched run of injuries, Kewell's return lifted the side and added a dash of pure class and has given Australia options should the armband become vacant. After making his national team debut way back in 1996, Harry remains the ace in our pack.

> "Harry Kewell's performance spoke volumes for his commitment and importance..."

7 Chipperfield's Tashkent cracker

The first game of the final round of qualifiers was always going to be difficult. After all, Australia had never visited Uzbekistan before and this wily opponent hadn't lost a qualifier at home for 18 months.

Compounding this was the game-day scare where Jason Culina and Jade North succumbed to stomach bugs.

But Australia's confidence was high after defeating the Dutch just days earlier in a friendly. And Scott Chipperfield epitomised this sense of belief. His first half display was outstanding in his role as a marauding left back.

And it was this sense of purpose that took him inside the box in the first half, as Luke Wilkshire explains. "I remember it well. I was heading down the bye-line and looked across to see who was in the box. It was odd to see 'Chippers' in there. But as soon as I put the ball in, he was on the end of it. It was strange for a right-back crossing for a left-back to score in a game away from home, but it was a great goal."

It proved the winner. The goal helped the Socceroos launch their final round of qualifiers in truly fine style.

8 Carl Valeri's coming of age on the world stage

The role of the holding midfielder has become a key component of Pim Verbeek's game-plan. Quite often two players are deployed in that position to strangle the opposition and in this campaign, it's been exciting to witness Valeri realise his potential in this area.

At only 23 years of age when the campaign kicked off, the Canberra-born starlet has provided a relentless work-rate, defensive cover and when need be, an ability to slot in alongside both Vince Grella or Jason Culina in the middle of the park, with injuries to Grella at key moments.

Valeri has also stepped up in his own right. Against Uzbekistan and Bahrain (both away), his contributions were very encouraging in difficult and trying circumstances.

The form of Valeri – the son of Walter Valeri, one-time star player on the local club scene – augers well for the rest of this qualification phase.

Seven years in the demanding hothouse of Italian football has been the perfect breeding ground for Valeri to play this role, and his rise has given the Socceroos a new dimension at vital times in this campaign.

> "The Canberra-born starlet has provided a relentless work-rate, defensive cover and an ability to slot in alongside Grella or Culina"

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TURNING POINTS
on the road to South Africa

9 Brett Emerton's Doha double

After the slender loss to Iraq in Dubai, Australia needed to bounce back quickly in June 2008. Qatar provided the perfect opportunity just days later and it was the Blackburn Rover who injected himself into the game with stunning effect. A brace for Emerton, one in each half, and a Harry Kewell strike wrapped the points up for Pim Verbeek's Socceroos.

Early in the first half and a flowing move laced with a dash of luck unlocked the Qataris. Brett Holman found Mark Bresciano wide on the left who finessed a low cross to Kewell. Australia's skipper missed his kick but the ball slid through perfectly for Emerton to slam home.

It was 1-0 to the Australians and Emerton made it two shortly after the break to take a stranglehold on the game. In the 56th minute, Schwarzer's punt down the middle reached Kewell. He flicked it on to Holman who found Emerton on the burst running into goal. His cool finish was classic Emo.

Emerton's goals took the sting out of Qatar and Kewell added a third to make the points safe. It was a timely reminder – given his injury later in the campaign – of Emerton's value as a tireless midfielder with a penchant for scoring regularly.

10 Finally: the fans

For the first time, Australia played in AFC FIFA World Cup qualifiers. It threw out a challenge to the green and gold army. They took it on willingly.

Green and gold scarves around the bodkins of weary but happy Aussie travellers turned up in far-flung places such as Tashkent, Manama, Yokohama, Kunming and Doha.

The fans have stepped up their loyalty to the men who've walked out into some intimidating cauldrons across the region.

"I am not sure if you would call my love a passion, I think my family and friends say it is more of an obsession," says Melbourne-based Socceroo fan Amelia Roth.

"It's about pride in your team and country," adds Ben Campton from Sydney. "These players are representing, not only a football team, but Australia itself."

Aussie 'keeper Mark Schwarzer sums up one special moment: "The fans were as pumped as we were to get that point in Kunming. To enjoy that moment with them was special."

We salute all the Socceroo supporters, you've played a big part in this campaign.

So give it up for our boys in green & gold Go the Super-Socceroos in Super June

BAHRAIN

RED ALERT

Last time around, this small Gulf nation experienced FIFA World Cup agony in the qualifiers. Can they go one better this time?

WORDS Aidan Ormond

FOR A NATION WITH A POPULATION roughly that of the Central Coast and Newcastle combined, this pint-sized Arab country, located east of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf, has consistently punched well above its weight in the Asian Football Confederation.

The Reds' aggressive, powerful style has been employed to good effect as both Japan and Australia have discovered in recent times. And on the back of a generation of current players such as Qatar-based Ala'a Hubail as well as Salman Isa, Faouzi Aaish and others, real success could be just around the corner for Al-Ahmar (translated as "The Red").

In recent years, Bahrain have shocked the big guns at AFC Asian Cup level and have come within a whisker of qualification for the FIFA World Cup.

This time around, the job of guiding Bahrain to an historic first-ever FIFA World Cup qualification is Czech-born trainer Milan Macala. A journeyman known for his rigid tactical approach, Macala is well remembered in Oman where he had multiple stints in charge of the national team. He led Kuwait to Gulf Cup victories in 1996 and again two years later. The 65-year-old has also coached UAE, Saudi Arabia and UAE club side Al Ain. So you could say the wily Czech is an Asian football specialist.

Bahrain are going to need all his skill and experience if they are to stay in contention for a spot at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. In this final phase of group qualifying, a third-place finish will hand them a play-off with the corresponding third-place finisher in Group B. From there, the winner moves into an inter-continental play-off against OFC champions New Zealand.

With Japan and Australia confident of a top two finish, it may well be that Bahrain's qualification path takes this extra twist and turn.

In Bahrain, however, this scenario has an eerie familiarity.

> "Real success could be just around the corner for the Reds of Bahrain"

Four years ago, the Reds were 45 minutes from qualifying for the 2006 FIFA World Cup. That was until Dwight Yorke's Trinidad & Tobago applied a killer blow in the play-off.

In fact, it had been a pretty bizarre campaign for Bahrain under then-coach, Serb Luka Peruzovic. Uzbekistan also ended up third in the second AFC group meaning it was Bahrain against the Central Asian nation in the AFC play-off.

The first leg was played in Tashkent. In an incident that has gone down in AFC folklore, the Japanese referee awarded a penalty to the home side but after Server Djeparov had scored, the man in the middle gave an indirect free-kick to Bahrain for encroachment by Uzbek Timur Kapadze.

Uzbekistan won 1-0 that day. But that didn't matter – FIFA deliberated and declared the result null and void. The Uzbeks appealed to FIFA against having a replay but it was rejected.

The re-match four weeks later, controlled by Swiss referee Massimo Busacca, ended 1-1. Talal Yousef's 17th-minute strike for Bahrain was cancelled by Maksim Shatskikh two minutes later, leaving Bahrain in a handy position ahead of the return leg in Manama. Al Ahmar held on for a 0-0 draw to go through on the away-goals rule.

Bahrain were now dreaming of Germany 2006 – their first ever FIFA World Cup qualification. But standing in their way was Trinidad & Tobago in the intercontinental play-off.

Ahead of this CONCACAF versus AFC showdown, it was all hands on deck. Bahrain suspended their league action while clubs in neighbouring Qatar released all Bahraini players for national team camps. However, Trinidad & Tobago's Dutch coach Leo »

Bahraini midfielder Mohamed Salmeen

VITAL STATISTICS

Country	
Association	
Official site	
FIFA Ranking	
AFC Ranking	
National Stadium	
Capital	
Population	
Major cities	
Currency	
Official language	

Abdullah Marzooq on the burst against Japan

Beenhakker had his spies at all three games against the Uzbeks and had the talismanic Dwight Yorke to call on.

It was to be a fascinating finale. The Bahrainis headed to the scenic capital, Port of Spain, and got the result they wanted: a 1-1 draw at the Hasely Crawford Stadium.

Hussein Salman gave Bahrain the lead with 17 minutes left by heading in a corner, but Christopher Birchall drove in a half-volley equaliser four minutes later to rescue the draw and keep the Soca Warriors in the tie.

At home in Manama, in front of an anticipatory crowd, Bahrain rightly felt confident going into this ultimate qualification clash. World Cup fever ran hot in Bahrain, but the pressure was on.

Another 0-0 draw and Bahrain would be through. And that was the score at half-time. Forty-five minutes from glory, they could taste success. Then, it all went horribly, horribly wrong.

Five minutes into the second half, T&T's Dennis Lawrence, unmarked in the Bahrain box, smashed home a header from a corner. The Soca Warriors sensed this was their night and they could've been two up had it not been for the crossbar.

Bahrain were shaken badly and ended in disarray with Ahmed Hassan's disallowed goal late on leading to the red card of Hussain Ali Baba for man-handling the referee

The final whistle was blown shortly after - the Bahrainis sunk to the ground stunned as Trinidad & Tobago celebrated their first ever FIFA World Cup qualification. For Bahrain, it was heart-wrenching despair.

So you can understand why Bahraini fans aren't getting their hopes up if their heroes do make it into a third-placed showdown in this phase of qualification

That bitter memory aside, since the turn of the new century Bahrain have shown they are capable of racking up some impressive results. In the FIFA World Cup qualifiers for the 2002 event in Japan and South Korea, Bahrain beat both Iraq and Iran but was squeezed out of contention by some of the big guns of the AFC.

A year later Bahrain were runners-up at the Arab Nations Cup and at the 2004 AFC Asian Cup, in only their second appearance at the tournament, they stunned the football world by making the semi-finals. In fact, they were just 10 seconds from knocking eventual winners Japan out of the Cup. It was at this event held in China that Bahrain marksman Ala'a Hubail got noticed, finishing joint top scorer of the tournament.

Little wonder FIFA handed Bahrain the award for most-improved nation for 2004 as this tiny country jumped to 44 in the world rankings.

A few years later and in a tough AFC 2007 Asian Cup group with Saudi Arabia, South Korea and host nation Indonesia, the Bahrainis exited at the group stage.

But they weren't down for long as it was Hubail's goal in 2008 that helped beat regional heavyweight Japan in a round three FIFA World Cup qualifier.

What's more, Bahrain beat the Blue Samurai once again earlier this year in a 2011 AFC Asian Cup qualifier with Salman Isa scoring the winner after 25 minutes.

So at international level, you can see why Bahrain is not to be taken lightly. At the same time, at club level Bahrain have continued to improve as the Bahrain Football Association seek to re-organise their league

> "Bahrain were just 10 seconds from knocking Japan out of the AFC Asian Cup 2004"

structure. After this current season, the 19-team Bahrain Premier League will split into a Premier League and a Second Division. The top 10 sides from this year's league will remain in the BPL while the bottom nine will be "relegated" to the second tier.

One club likely to remain in the elite is Muharraq Club. The current reigning champions are the Manchester United of Bahrain, having won the domestic trophy some 30 times - 21 times more than their nearest rival Riffa.

Delve deeper and club football in Bahrain has a rich history. The first unofficial games can be traced back to the late 1920s in »

STAR MAN

Ala'a Hubail

Hubail is Bahrain's go-to man who could unlock the stingy Socceroo defence tonight.

His record suggests he will be the outlet when the Reds push forward. Hubail burst on the scene five years ago. Then 22, he was joint top scorer at the 2004 AFC Asian Cup with five goals, sharing the award with Iranian star Ali Karimi.

At that tournament, he bagged a brace against Uzbekistan in the quarters and another double against Japan in the semis before Bahrain bowed out with heads held high.

Ever since then, the Bahrain speedster has been a consistent menace in tandem with the likes of Hussain Ali and Jaycee John. He's even shot an advertisement for a major soft drink company; such is his growing fan-base in Bahrain

In round three FIFA World Cup qualifiers last year, Bahrain stunned Japan winning 1-0 in Manama. And it was Hubail who did the damage scoring in the 77th minute to move Bahrain to the top of their group at the time

Hubail headed home from close range after Japan goalkeeper Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi had failed to gather a cross from Ismail Abdullateef.

Alaa, a former Al-Ahli youth player, is currently on the books of Qatari club Umm Salal although he's previously had a spell with Kuwait SC.

And for Hubail, the move to the high profile Qatar league means he's teammates with Brazilians Magno Alves - the former J-League top scorer - and Fabrice Souza.

What's more, the club has finished in the top two of its group in the AFC Asian Champions League with Hubail scoring twice on match-day five against Al Jazira of the UAE. Watch out for him in the knockout stage later this month and, of course, tonight.

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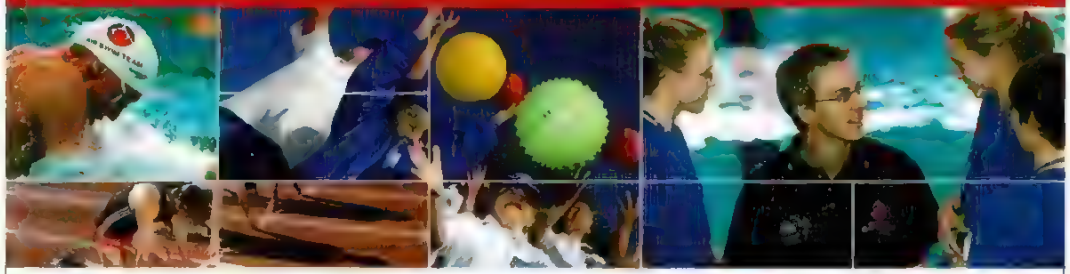

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BAHRAIN'S NEXT GEN

Bahrain's next generation of stars will enjoy a trip of a lifetime when they travel to England this July.

English powerhouse Arsenal have set up a schools program in Bahrain which culminated in 17 lucky Bahraini youngsters being chosen to visit London for the club's international festival next month.

More than 47 schools and clubs, and over 329 youngsters, participated in the recent event with the judging panel including three members of the Arsenal Soccer Schools.

The lucky players were picked after the finale to the two-day festival held at the Bahrain Football Association grounds in Riffa.

The squad selected is: Mustafa Tariq, Mahmood Ali, Sayed Diya, Rashed Swar, Abdulrahman Mohamed (Al Najma); Ali Ahmed Ghaleb, Abdulrahman Basheer, Ali Al Ameer (Muharraq); Amar A. Hussain, Salman Abdullah (Al Hala); Jaffar Mahmood (Al Ettefaq); Nasser Saud (Galali); Mujtaba Mohamed Guloom (Manama); Khaled Ahmed (East Riffa Club); Joshua Smith (St. Christopher's School); Kumail Al Adoom (Othman School); Hussain Al Safi (Awal School)

Abdullah Fetadi

> "Will Bahrain banish their tag of nearly-men by qualifying for their first FIFA World Cup in 2010?"

schools, and by the 1930s Bahraini teams had begun playing matches abroad.

However, football's formalisation really took hold in 1958 with the creation of the Bahrain Football Association (BFA). A decade later Bahrain was officially recognised by FIFA, becoming a full member, and a year on, the country was invited into the AFC.

Bahrain also holds a special place in Aussie football history, for it was in Manama in early 2006 that the Socceroos played their first ever AFC fixture. In fact, Bahrain went close to an upset before the visitors got into top gear and ran out 3-1 winners.

So near, yet so far. That pretty much sums up Bahrain. Could 2009 see a repeat of the 2005 nightmare or will Al-Ahmar banish their reputation as the nearly-men tag by qualifying for their first FIFA World Cup? ■

AUSTRALIA v BAHRAIN

Fill in numbers as line-ups are announced

GOALKEEPERS

- Brad **Jones**
- Michael **Petkovic**
- Mark **Schwarzer**

DEFENDERS

- **Chipperfield**
- **Coyne**
- **Kalac**
- **Milligan**
- **Neill**
- **Neill**
- Matthew **Spiranovic**
- Shane **Stefanutto**
- Luke **Wilkshire**
- Rhys **Williams**

MIDFIELDERS

- **Brosinac**
- **Burns**
- **Cahill**
- **Carle**
- **Carney**
- **Culina**
- Richard **Garcia**
- Vince **Grella**
- Brett **Holman**
- Mile **Jedinak**
- Mile **Sterjovski**
- **Valeri**

FORWARDS

- **Djite**
- **Kewell**
- **Kennedy**
- **McDonald**
- **Vidosic**

GOALSCORERS

GOALKEEPERS

- Sayed Mohamed
- Abbas Ahmed Ali Khamis
- Sayed Sl

DEFENDERS

MIDFIELDERS

- Abduli

FORWARDS

GOALSCORERS

Meet your Socceroos

Here is the squad picked by Pim Verbeek to take on Bahrain in tonight's FIFA World Cup qualifier

Pim **Verbeek**

Age 53
Position Head Coach
Appointed in December 2007 after successful coaching stints in the AFC, the Dutchman has been a huge success.

Henk **Duut**

Age 45
Position Coach
An experienced player in his native Holland, Duut has also coached in his homeland as well as Japan.

Graham **Arnold**

Age 45
Position Coach
A decorated Socceroo who has been part of the coaching set-up for the last decade.

FOOTBALL FEDERATON AUSTRALIA STAFF
Phillip Wolanski Head of Delegation
Pim Verbeek Head Coach
Gary Moretti Team Manager
Graham Arnold Coach
Henk Duut Coach
Tony Franken Goalkeeping Coach
Ron Smith Technical Analyst
Darren Burgess Conditioner
Dr Peter Brukner Doctor
Phil Coles Senior Physiotherapist
Les Gells Physiotherapist
Luke Attwell Masseur
Dom Rabsch Equipment Manager
Martin Felice Equipment Assistant
Adam Mark Media Manager
Lindsay McNeill TV Unit
Mark Saliba Security

Goalkeepers

Brad **Jones**

Age 27
Position Goalkeeper
Club Middlesbrough (England)
Appearances 1

A long-time understudy to Mark Schwarzer at Middlesbrough, 2009 was something of a watershed year.
While Middlesbrough was recently relegated to the English Championship, Jones established himself as the club's [illegible] shot stopper after beating off stiff opposition from teammate Ross Turnbull. The Perth born glovesman has represented Australia just once before: in 2007 he faced off against an Alvaro Recoba and Diego Forlanned Uruguay in a friendly. That night the Socceroos went down 2-1.

Michael **Petkovic**

Age 32
Position Goalkeeper
Club Sivasspor (Turkey)
Appearances 6

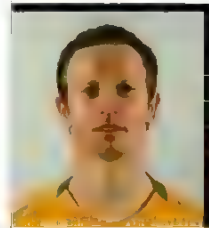
Petkovic is coming off the back of a brilliant season in the Turkish Super League.
Along with brother Jason, also a keeper, Michael has represented the Socceroos, albeit intermittently, since 2001. Was chosen for the 2005 Confederations Cup and started against Tunisia in the third game. He has been plying his trade in Turkey in the last few years, first with Trabzonspor before moving to Sivasspor in 2005-06. This season, Petkovic has helped his team beat both Fenerbahce and Galatasaray.

Mark **Schwarzer**

Age 36
Position Goalkeeper
Club Fulham (England)
Appearances 65

A move from Middlesbrough to London club Fulham has re-invigorated our brilliant shot-stopper.
Mark's place in Australian footballing history is set thanks to his dramatic FIFA World Cup qualifying heroics against Uruguay in 2005. He began his Socceroo career in similar fashion by starring in a shoot-out during a 1993 FIFA World Cup qualifier against Canada in his first senior appearance. An experienced star in the English Premiership, "Schwarzy" has proved a fan fave wherever he's played.

Defenders



David **Carney**

Age 25
Position Defender
Club Sheffield United (England)
Appearances 18

An exciting attacking defender, Carney has been in the Australian spotlight since his A-League debut in 2005.
David caught the eye with some outstanding performances at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup finals, playing in the role of left wing-back. It earned him a contract with Sheffield United after he'd made his name at Sydney FC in the A-League. He is now battling for a regular spot with Scott Chipperfield down the left of the Socceroo defence and has been loaned out to Norwich City this season.

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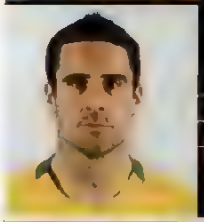
Cancer Council

Scott Chipperfield

Age 33
Position Defender
Club FC Basel (Switzerland)
Appearances 60

One of our most reliable performers at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, Chipperfield is hungry for more.

After winning his second Australian Player of the Year award in 2001 he moved to Switzerland where he continued his club success at Basel. A natural left-sided player with pace and an ability to take on and regularly beat defenders, he has been a regular in the national team since debuting in 1998. Chipperfield's brilliant goal in Tashkent during this qualifying campaign will go down as one of our most vital



Chris Coyne

Age 30
Position Defender
Club Colchester United (England)
Appearances 5

Consistency and a steely resolve has paid off for this tough England-based defender.

Older brother of Perth Glory's Jamie Coyne, Chris has been playing his club football in England for over a decade. Originally at West Ham, he found form and stability at Luton Town and now Colchester. He has easily made the step up to the Socceroos this year where he's looked very comfortable alongside Lucas Neill at the heart of the defence. Coyne has been crucial during the Socceroos qualification process.

Adrian Madaschi

Age 26
Position Defender
Club Portogruaro-Summaga (Italy)
Appearances 4

Madaschi returns to the senior side for the first time since 2004. Then, the central defender helped the Socceroos qualify for the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

Now, the Perth-born former U/23 internationalist is aiming to play his way into regular contention as we edge closer towards South Africa. Madaschi left Australia as a youngster for Serie A side Atalanta. While his career there did not hit the heights he had hoped Madaschi is vastly experienced from his time in Scotland and Italy

Mark Milligan

Age 23
Position Defender
Club Shanghai Shenhua (China)
Appearances 6

The former national U/23 captain has a new-found spring in his step after finding form in the Chinese Super League.

Milligan first burst onto the scene with Northern Spirit but did enough in the first season of the A-League with Sydney FC to be noticed by the national team. Milligan has a no nonsense approach and a natural competitiveness and has been known to play a variety of roles as a defender and midfielder which he showcased at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup.

Lucas Neill

Age 31
Position Defender
Club West Ham United (England)
Appearances 48

One of Australia's most recognisable stars, Neill seems to grow in stature every time he plays for his country.

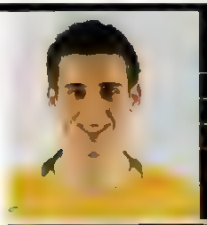
Lucas made his Socceroos debut over 10 years ago but it's only over the last four or five years that he has really established himself as our defensive linchpin and leader. At the 2006 FIFA World Cup he became one of our most outstanding players after a series of commanding performances. Neill is the captain at English Premier League side West Ham and was also a favourite at his previous club, Blackburn Rovers

Jade North

Age 27
Position Defender
Club Incheon United (Korea Republic)
Appearances 23

Jade North's growing experience makes the Incheon United player a valuable Socceroo asset.

A mobile and versatile defender, North fits the bill for the modern Socceroo perfectly. The former Newcastle Jets defender has learnt his trade in the Australian system, having represented in our national U/17 U/20 and U/23 sides as well as the senior side over the last eight years. And Taree-born North's form now continues to impress in Korea's highly demanding K-League.



Matthew Spiranovic

Age 20
Position Defender
Club FC Nurnberg (Germany)
Appearances 2

The player widely touted as a future national team star has already impressed in Germany's top flights.

Currently plying his trade at German second division side Nurnberg, Spiranovic has already represented Australia at youth level and debuted in a friendly against Ghana last year. His assured performances at the Olympics in China is proof that "Spira" can be part of the national team for years to come. Tall, tough and confident on the ball, the Geelong-born player is all class.

Shane Stefanutto

Age 29
Position Defender
Club FC Lyn Oslo (Norway)
Appearances 1

A product of Queensland, Stefanutto has become a regular call-up to Pim Verbeek's squads.

The Cairns-born attacking defender provides another weapon for Verbeek down the Socceroo left. After graduating from Queensland's Institute of Sport and a successful spell with Brisbane Strikers, Shane left Australia in 2004 and has been playing his football ever since in the Norwegian league firstly with Lillestrom and now at Lyn Oslo. The livewire made his debut in a friendly against China in 2007.

Rhys Williams

Age 20
Position Defender
Club Middlesbrough (England)
Appearances 0

Potentially, Williams could evolve as one of Australia's most important defenders over the next decade.

Williams recently made the significant move to [illegible] who signed him to a two year deal in early 2009. This year Williams has played for Burnley on loan.

Luke Wilkshire

Age 27
Position Defender
Club Dinamo Moscow (Russia)
Appearances 33

The south coast produced has been accurately described as very mobile, speedy and technical.

Playing for the U/23s at the Athens Olympics put Luke in the mix for the Socceroos. He moved from Middlesbrough to Bristol City in 2003 where regular first team football improved his game, as shown by his impressive displays at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. This tenacious midfielder moved to FC Twente and this season signed with Russian club Dinamo Moscow. Wilkshire has become a regular Socceroo starter.

JULY ISSUE
ON SALE NOW

Midfielders

Mark Bresciano

Age 29
Position Midfielder
Club US Palermo (Italy)
Appearances 48

Crucial goals from this decorated player have proven the difference for Australia on countless occasions.

After representing the Young Socceroos in 1999 and the U/23s at the Sydney Olympics in 2000, Mark has etched out an excellent career in the highly technical and tactically demanding Italian Serie A. Clubs such as Empoli, Parma and now Palermo have benefited from his intelligent attacking runs and precision free kicks. One of Australia's stars of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany and in this campaign.

Jacob Burns

Age 31
Position Midfielder
Club FC Unirea Valcenterum (Romania)
Appearances 9

A widely-travelled midfielder and former teammate of Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell at Leeds United.

After a successful stint with Parramatta Power, Jacob spent six seasons in Yorkshire, England with first Leeds then Barnsley before moving to Poland then Romania. He was excellent in Australia's midfield in last year's 1-0 win over Uzbekistan in Tashkent. Hard-working Jacob debuted in 2000 when the Aussies shocked Scotland 2-0 at Hampden Park in a friendly. A versatile option for Pim Verbeek in the middle of the park.

Tim Cahill

Age 29
Position Midfielder
Club Everton (England)
Appearances 28

Already a legend at his English club Everton, Cahill is one of Australia's most potent attacking weapons.

Tim will be forever etched in Australian football folklore as the first Aussie player to score at a FIFA World Cup when he slammed home the equaliser against Japan at Germany 2006. In England, he is arguably the best attacking midfielder in the EPL and makes a welcome return to the national team after missing some key games this year through injury. Cahill possesses an uncanny ability to score at crucial times.

Nick Carle

Age 27
Position Midfielder
Club Crystal Palace (England)
Appearances 7

Electric and skilful, this former A-League star is one of the country's most gifted talents.

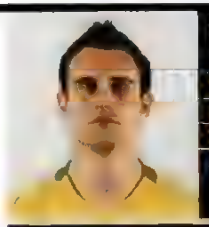
Nick is known for his flair and creativity and his ability to unlock defences with his trickery and vision. He featured in Australia's 2007 AFC Asian Cup campaign, scoring in the penalty shoot-out against Japan and has since played in Turkey and now with Crystal Palace in England. Nick won the A-League's Johnny Warren Medal as the Player of the Year for 2006/07 and is a real fan favourite.

Jason Culina

Age 29
Position Midfielder
Club Gold Coast United
Appearances 38

Gold Coast United's brand-new marquee star, Culina is a crucial component in the Socceroo engine room.

Jason's mobility, link play, eye for goal and ability to play [illegible] journey to South Africa for the Socceroos. He is now [illegible] players for his consistency and versatility. For PSV Eindhoven, he has won trophies and played in both the UEFA European Champions League and the UEFA Cup.



Richard Garcia

Age 27
Position Midfielder
Club Hull City (England)
Appearances 4

Garcia was a key player in Hull City's promotion to the English Premiership. Recently, he helped them stay there.

An attacking midfielder who has come back into the spotlight since his ongoing success with Hull City since 2008. Garcia left Australian shores as a youngster to join the famed West Ham United youth academy. Suffered a major knee injury in 2000, ending any hopes of playing at the Sydney Olympics. Made his debut for Australia in 2008 and was key in the Socceroos' last home game against Uzbekistan.

Vince Grella

Age 29
Position Midfielder
Club Blackburn Rovers (England)
Appearances 37

Grella is back to full fitness following a stop-start season due to injuries.

A hard-working central midfielder who closes down opposing players and mops up stray passes, Grella is a vital cog in the heart of the Socceroo midfield. He blossomed with Empoli in Serie A and upon their relegation in 2004 was signed by Parma where he was reunited with his good mate and fellow Socceroo Mark Bresciano. Since then he has played for Torino before moving to Blackburn in England.

Brett Holman

Age 25
Position Midfielder
Club AZ Alkmaar (Holland)
Appearances 23

A player with pace, Holman causes problems for opposition defence through his ability to find space.

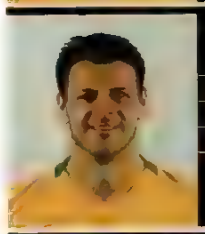
The clever attacking midfielder burst onto the Aussie scene [illegible] Feyenoord. He was then loaned out to Excelsior, although the [illegible] moved to NEC Nijmegen at the end of the 2006 season and also debuted for the Socceroos that year. He is now with AZ Alkmaar where he has shown impressive form.

Mile Jedinak

Age 24
Position Midfielder
Club Genclerbirligi SK (Turkey)
Appearances 4

A star in the A-League for Central Coast Mariners, Jedinak attracted attention from suitors from Turkey.

Only a couple of years ago Mile was playing in the New South Wales state league. But after two outstanding seasons with Central Coast in the A-League, he has forced his powerful frame into Socceroos reckoning as well as making a move to the Turkish Super League. An enforcer in midfield, Jedinak provides quality defensive cover and also possess a powerful strike.



Mile Sterjovski

Age 30
Position Midfielder
Club Derby County (England)
Appearances 39

A mainstay in the national set-up, Sterjovski has been playing in top European leagues for close to a decade.

Mile is another talented product of the Wollongong football scene. He first got noticed in the late 1990s with he moved to Europe in 2000 - first with Lille in France then Switzerland's Basel where he has made his name as an attacking wide midfielder. In January he moved to Derby in England where his class and determination impressed the local fans despite his side's poor run of results.

Carl Valeri

Age 24
Position Midfielder
Club U.S. Grosseto (Italy)
Appearances 16

Canberra-raised Valeri has refined his game in Italy and delivers whenever required in the Socceroo midfield.

The defensive midfielder has represented Australia at all levels and made his debut for the Socceroos in March 2007 against China. Carl has played all his professional football in Italy, after he was signed by Inter Milan, who have loaned him out to lower-level clubs to gain experience. With age still very much still on his side, Valeri is expected to be a regular Socceroo for years to come.

Strikers

Bruce Djite

Age 22
Position Striker
Club Genclerbirligi (Turkey)
Appearances 7

A strong and fast centre forward, Djite is also gifted with both intelligence and maturity.

Bruce is one of the hottest players in the Australian ranks, after bursting on to the scene with some memorable displays during his time at Adelaide United. Djite was also pivotal for our U/23s during Olympics qualification, showing an ability to hold the ball up in his role as target man. Djite has continued to live up to his promise, showing promising form in the pressured environment of Turkey's top league.

Josh Kennedy

Age 26
Position Striker
Club Karlsruher (Germany)
Appearances 12

A tall and hard-working striker who continues to score at crucial times for the Socceroos.

[illegible] could forget his [illegible] the Socceroos 2006 FIFA World Cup campaign? After coming on late in the opener against Japan, it was the 192cm striker's presence that unsettled the Japanese defence. He continues to be a dangerous impact player for the Socceroos as evidenced by his great form during this campaign where goals against Qatar and Uzbekistan have proved vital.

Harry Kewell

Age 30
Position Striker
Club Galatasaray (Turkey)
Appearances 39

Still widely regarded as Australia's talisman, Kewell has beaten serious injury to return to top form.

Recently voted one of the top five Australian footballers of all time by *FourFourTwo* magazine, Kewell is an Aussie sports icon. His performances at the 2006 FIFA World Cup were memorable as were his goals over a decade ago in a FIFA World Cup qualifier against Iran. Harry is enjoying a new lease of life in Turkish football with Galatasaray where he regularly scores and creates opportunities for fellow attackers.

Scott McDonald

Age 25
Position Striker
Club Celtic (Scotland)
Appearances 11

A prolific scorer in the Scottish Premier League, his goal-scoring prowess will prove a huge asset for the national team.

Consistent performances for Motherwell earned Scott a full international call-up for the Socceroos against Bahrain in 2006. Since then, the Melbourne born striker has become one of the hottest Aussie strikers in Europe scoring a bagful of goals for Scottish giant Celtic in the league and in the UEFA Champions League.

Dario Vidosic

Age 22
Position Striker
Club FC Nurnberg (Germany)
Appearances 0

The former Roar attacker has a number of memorable A-League goal-scoring highlights already behind him.

Vidosic had a one-week trial with German Bundesliga side Nurnberg, where he was successful in earning a contract. Despite limited opportunities in his first season, Vidosic is now coming into his own. Just recently, the Australian Institute of Sport graduate scored a crucial goal in Nurnberg's 1-1 draw against Greuther Fürth. It was his second goal in consecutive games. He looms as a future Socceroo star.

HUNTER *heritage*

In 2009, Northern NSW Football celebrates 125 years. We take a stroll down memory lane and review the Hunter's rich history

WORDS Sebastian Hassett

ASK ANYONE WHO THINKS THEY KNOW A BIT ABOUT NEW South Wales to list what springs to mind when you mention the Hunter Valley. Chances are the answers will go something like this: steel, coal and football played with hands not feet.

Like any time-honoured stereotype, there's a good balance of merit and myth giving weight to the story. Of course, Newcastle, the metropolitan hub of the Hunter, is a working man's city at heart. It's a well-worn badge of honour, forged over decades at the coalface. Literally.

However, to pin Newcastle down in such simple terms is unfair – and misleading. This may be a region of industry, but it's also a hub of surfers and environmentalists, artisans, restaurateurs and entrepreneurs.

And thus we come to sport. Sure, rugby league projects a dominant image courtesy of the Newcastle Knights, but football has never been far away. After all, Newcastle isn't known as the nation's "cradle of football" for nothing. Driving into Newcastle brings visions of countless football fields; some bearing the hybrid goal posts that serve as a fine metaphor for the Hunter's divided sporting loyalties.

Right now, the association that most football fans will make between the city and the sport comes in the form of the Newcastle Jets, yet the connection goes far deeper than that.

Let's start at the top. The city's name was borrowed from the English port of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne as a reflection of the area's similarly vast coal deposits, and is where many of the city's first workers emigrated from in the 19th century.

Of course, followers of the English Premier League will be familiar with the unmatched passion of the Geordies for their football team, Newcastle United. Naturally, the same regional fervour is shared by their Australian namesakes.

Since 1884, exactly 125 years ago, football has been continuously played in Newcastle, only four years after the first ever match was played on these shores. In 1889, the famous Adamstown Rosebuds were formed, and to this day they still compete in the NewFM Football League, one division below the flagship competition of Northern NSW football, the NBN State League.

ABOVE **Newcastle United captain Roy Drinkwater leaps to head the ball away from Adelaide City pair Johnny Nyskohus and Ian Seddon in 1979**

> "Newcastle has enjoyed a near-permanent spot in the top flight"

It's the brilliantly-named Weston Workers Bears – formed in 1907 – that remain in the top local league. The Bears have proven themselves as a resilient powerhouse and an excellent developer of young talent with the likes of Richard Johnson, Stuart Musialik and Nigel Boogaard all wearing the black-and-white stripes with distinction.

On a national level, Newcastle has enjoyed a near-permanent spot in the top flight, with Newcastle KB United entering the National Soccer League in 1978, a year after the league's formation. They immediately proved a smash hit with fans and frequently pulled in five-figure crowds, even drawing 18,367 for a match against Sydney »

GRAND PLANS FOR A SUPER STADIUM

Given its rich history, it's only fitting that football in Newcastle has a stadium to match. Presently a 26,000 capacity venue, Newcastle Stadium is in the final stage of convertion into one of the nation's best rectangular venues, capable of holding 33,000 expanding to 40,000.

With the new stand (right) completed in 2005, an impressive vision of the stadium's future can already be seen.

By the time the full developments are completed in 2010, Newcastle will boast a premier venue, and should be well positioned as a host city should Australia win the bidding for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup or even a FIFA World Cup.

EVENTS NSW PROUDLY HOSTING

2010 FIFA WORLD CUP ASIAN QUALIFIERS

Events NSW is proud to have the 2010 FIFA World Cup Asian Qualifiers at Stadium Australia on the NSW Master Events Calendar. There is no better place to host the Socceroos' penultimate match in the 2010 FIFA World Cup Asian Qualifiers than Australia's global city and football capital.

To view the NSW Master Events Calendar visit:
eventsnsw.com.au

NEW GOVERNMENT
EVENTS NEW SOUTH WALES

> "Any discussion about Newcastle's football is incomplete without mentioning Baartz and Johnston"

Olympic in April 1979 - a regular season domestic record crowd which stood for nearly two decades.

However, their fortunes dwindled and they were replaced by the Rosebuds in 1984. They managed two seasons before re-joining the local league and it wasn't until 1991 that the town would re-establish a presence with the arrival of the Newcastle Breakers.

They lasted until the formation of Newcastle United in 2001, which later entered the A-League as the re-badged entity that exists today.

But any discussion about Newcastle's football history is incomplete without mentioning its two greatest sons: Ray Baartz and Craig Johnston.

Their legacy is unmistakable. Two of the nation's most skilful players, their contributions are difficult to fully measure.

In Newcastle, the footprint of Baartz remains enormous. He is a local identity of iconic scale, not out of place in the company of other Hunter sporting heroes like Andrew Johns and Jack Newton. He honed his skills with Adamstown and was such a prodigy that he was sent to trial with English giants Manchester United. They were so impressed with his talent that he was promptly signed a two-year contract. It was 1964 and he was just 17.

But with the world at his feet, the young striker wanted to come home. He missed Australia and his family, and it was left to Sydney Hakoah to fork out a then-record Australian transfer fee of 5,600 (A$11,362) to secure his services.

As there was no national league at the time, the New South Wales first division was regarded as the best competition in the land. Before Baartz joined in 1966, Hakoah hadn't won the championship. By the time he left in 1974, they'd won five. However, the circumstances in which he left the game might go down as perhaps the lowest act ever seen in Australian football.

Baartz was 27 and a leading light in the Socceroos, who had recently qualified for the 1974 FIFA World Cup in Germany. Playing in a supposed friendly match against Uruguay at the SCG, Baartz was going forward to support an attack when Uruguay's Luis Garisto gave what then-coach Rale Rasic described as a "karate chop" to Baartz's neck.

Baartz dusted himself off and recovered to score a goal and set up another in a typically brilliant display. However, after the match, his left arm seized up. He checked into hospital the next morning and fell unconscious for 48 hours. On waking, the »

LEFT Ray Baartz (fourth from left) lines up for the Socceroos in 1974 against Uruguay

JETS' FINEST HOUR

Just two weeks after having their hearts broken by the Central Coast in a two-legged 2007/08 season semi-final, the Newcastle Jets were determined to take revenge by winning the A-League Grand Final.

In a typically feisty derby, Newcastle steeled themselves to see off the Mariners' early charge and waited patiently for their opportunity. That moment came after 64 minutes when Socceroos' legend Tony Vidmar - playing his last game - was caught out by Jets' striker Mark Bridge, who launched himself towards the goal and, ironically, his close mate, Mariners' 'keeper Danny Vukovic.

Calmly, Bridge curled home to give the Jets a lead they held onto, despite a controversial finish that ended with Vukovic's dismissal and subsequent suspension.

His heartbreak was Newcastle's joy, with club owner Con Constantine memorably taking to the podium to celebrate the Jets' first-ever championship.

ABOVE Fans celebrate the Jets' 2007/08 A-League Championship

LEFT Former Matildas captain Cheryl Salisbury was born and raised in Newcastle

doctors were to deliver another blow. His playing days were over.

Baartz ultimately returned to Newcastle where he opened a sports store bearing his name, which remained opened for decades and only recently converted to a mobile business.

In a way, Craig Johnston's story is both the complete opposite – and eerily similar. Snapped up by Middlesbrough after paying his way over, the mercurial "Skippy" danced his way into the hearts of Teesside before being snapped up by Liverpool in 1981, right at the start of the Reds' most dominant decade.

Unlike Baartz, Johnston loved England and Liverpool loved him as they scaled the highest peaks of club football. And while Baartz became a Socceroos' legend, Johnston never played a single game for Australia.

> "Cheryl Salisbury is a football legend... and Emily Van Egmond could become the next big local star"

Yet tragedy would hit Johnston too when his sister was involved in a holiday accident in 1988 that left her requiring round-the-clock care. Also 27, he left the game, perhaps, like Baartz, with his best yet to come.

Those two may stand head and shoulders above as the best players to have emerged from the Hunter, but by no means are they the last Novocastrians of international class.

Local products like the silky-skilled Troy Halpin (now coaching Toronto Awaba in the NBN League) and Clayton Zane have all represented Australia since then, with young starlets like Stuart Musialik, Ben Kantarovski, Ben Kennedy and Jason Hoffman all well placed to make the step up to Socceroo level in years to come.

And let's not forget the girls. Cheryl Salisbury is a Matildas legend. And up-and-coming Emily Van Egmond could well become a new heroine in the Hunter. Both starred for the Jets in the inaugural women's W-League last season.

Looking forward, it's only natural that the most important cog of football in Newcastle will be the Jets. Their first four years in the A-League and this year's AFC Asian Champion's League have delivered everything from incredible highs to empty lows.

However, if the next 125 years are as eventful as the first, the Jets will continue to leave their mark in Australian football.

And while the steel works might have closed down, the production line of talent, stories and characters looks set to roll on in the Hunter. ■

THE GRIFFITHS BROTHERS TRIO

Since 2001, the Griffiths family has been synonymous with football in Newcastle. So much so that it would surprise many to learn that the family is not from the Hunter at all – but from Sydney's southern suburbs.

However, the contribution of Joel, Adam and Ryan to Newcastle football over the past decade has been immeasurable. All three have been capped as senior Socceroos, and while Joel is currently on loan at Beijing Guoan and Adam has now joined Gold Coast United, the club is hoping to lure Ryan back from Beijing to continue the tradition for at least a few more years.

Interestingly, while twins Joel and Adam were born on 21 August 1979, baby brother Ryan was born two years later – and on the very same day!

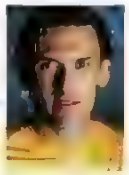
From old Poppa to new stopper

A look into the past and the future of the Socceroo defence

WORDS Aidan Ormond

PAST

Tony Popovic



Age: 35
Socceroo appearances: 59
Goals: 9
Socceroo debut: v Colombia, 1995
Other representative honours: U/23, U/20, U/17
Clubs: Sydney United, Wolves, Hiroshima, Crystal Palace, Al Arabi, Sydney FC
Current occupation: Sydney FC Assistant Coach

A reliable defender who scored vital goals, that was Tony Popovic.
After debuting in 1995 as a 22-year-old, Popovic was a regular in the national team for 11 years until he retired in 2006 (but more about that unforgettable night later).

Popovic's elevation to the national team heralded a new era that built on the sturdy foundations set by Alex Tobin and Milan Ivanovic and, over the ensuing years, saw "Poppa" partner the likes of Craig Moore, Shaun Murphy and Lucas Neill in the Socceroo defensive wall.

The big defender famously scored against England in 2003 to open the scoring in a fabulous 3-1 win over the English in London.

But for Popovic, helping Australia qualify for and play in a FIFA World Cup was the biggest highlight.

His contribution in helping to keep out the Uruguayans in the first leg of the final qualifier in November 2005 was legendary.

That final 20 minutes in Montevideo was frenzied as an overworked Aussie backline kept the Alvaro Recoba-led Uruguayans at bay while the sky blues pressed for a knockout second goal.

Popovic and Co. put up a gritty defence that shouldn't be forgotten. By keeping the score down to 1-0, they helped set up the second leg victory back in Australia.

And at the FIFA World Cup of 2006, Popovic was handed the job of controlling the Brazilian forward line in the Socceroos' second group game - which he did admirably before succumbing to injury just minutes before the break.

Nine goals in 59 appearances was a wonderful return, but it was his last goal in his final game that topped the lot.

After the exhilaration of the FIFA World Cup earlier that year, the friendly against Paraguay was to be his swan song. It was also the final game for a number of other Socceroos so emotions were high that night at Brisbane Stadium.

Popovic wrote his own headline with a headed goal from a set-piece to give the Aussies the lead. It sparked wild celebrations as the dugout emptied and on-field Socceroos mobbed their mate. Could a farewell get any better?

Fittingly for a player born on the 4th of July, Popovic sure went out with a bang.

FUTURE

Matthew Spiranovic

Age: 20
Socceroo appearances: 2
Socceroo debut: v Ghana, 2008
Other representative honours: U/23, U/20, U/17
Clubs: North Geelong, Melbourne Knights, FC Nurnberg

The future of the Socceroo defence is Matthew Spiranovic.
The buzz around Spiranovic continues and rightly so. The young Victorian appears to have all the attributes to become one of the great Socceroo defenders.

Spiranovic can play out from the back with intelligence, has wonderful composure on the ball allied with smart vision for one so young. Add an imposing physique and little wonder the Geelong-born lad is being talked about in such glowing terms.

Spiranovic, who turns 21 this month, has been honing his trade since 2006 with FC Nurnberg in Germany. And while injury has restricted his contribution in the Bundesliga, there's little doubt that when he's fit, he's good enough to make a mark in the top echelons of European football.

But it's his potential for Australia that has Socceroo fans excited. Last year he debuted for the national team aged just 19. That was against Ghana in a friendly in Sydney with most observers noting how comfortable he looked taking the step up.

A month later and the one-time Melbourne Knights and North Geelong player was at the heart of the national team in a FIFA World Cup qualifier loss against China - with Australia already qualified for the final phase of FIFA World Cup qualifiers, Pim Verbeek opted for an experimental side that night.

These two games were followed by an eye-catching campaign with the national U/23s at the Beijing Olympics.

Spiranovic was clearly the star of a team that battled against quality opposition Argentina, Ivory Coast and Serbia. On the big stage, the man they call "Spira" proved his international class.

This quality was honed in the Australian development system, at the Victorian Institute of Sport and the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra. He was also was picked in the national team for the 2005 FIFA U/17 World Championships in Peru and the 2006 AFC Youth Championships held in India.

When the era of Socceroo central defenders such as Craig Moore and Lucas Neill does finally end, the young Victorian is well-placed to step into their shoes.

At his age, you could see him for two, even three, FIFA World Cup campaigns to come. For a player so young, Matt Spiranovic has the world at his feet. And that's great news for the Socceroos.

MY FIRST TIME...

Alex Brosque

The Sydney FC striker tells of his surprise Socceroo debut in 2004

INTERVIEW Aidan Ormond

THE GAME

Socceroo debut vs Vanuatu
Tournament OFC Nations Cup & FIFA World Cup qualifier
Venue Hindmarsh Stadium, Adelaide
Date June 4, 2004
Result Australia 3 Vanuatu 0

Brosque makes his Socceroo debut against Vanuatu at Hindmarsh Stadium in Adelaide

"We had an Olympic team camp running alongside the Socceroo squad because we'd qualified for the 2004 Olympics in Athens and were preparing for that. While we weren't directly involved with the Socceroos our camps were also based in Adelaide.

There was one of the Socceroos got injured – I can't remember who it was – so at the end of the day I just remember being told we had to be over the moon to be in the Olympic team was great but to get that next step into the senior team was amazing.

I was a dream really. The fact we were training alongside the Socceroos was big enough in itself but to get called up out of the blue like that out of nowhere.

The camp took place during the Nations Cup period which were still ongoing. And of course there were a few players away with their clubs. They'd need to be released by their clubs to be able to join the squad. I remember getting the phone call from Graham Arnold to say that I'd been selected in the squad and I was going on for Captain's Run. I'd just finished in that game which was great.

But to get a call up for the national team was just amongst some really big names. Tim Cahill, Tony Vidmar, John Aloisi, Vince Grella, Brett Emerton, Stan Lazaridis, and Stefan Zeljko Kalac and Mile Sterjovski. It was the start of our World Cup campaign for 2006 Germany. So I was very lucky to be in Adelaide.

The good thing was that they were real good blokes with it though they were playing in some of the biggest leagues in the world. I went in there and it was a bit intimidating trying to compete with these guys. But they were great and it was an awesome few days.

Before the game against Vanuatu I was excited and nervous. Those were the two main emotions. When the anthem was going I was looking around at some of the players on our side and I was just in awe of them, and at the whole occasion.

> "It was a dream, really. The fact that we were training alongside the Socceroos was big enough in itself but to get called up."

And when I was out there I was just buzzing. I was running around everywhere. I played a kind of left wing-off midfield role.

I was on the pitch until the final 20 minutes of the game. By that point Johnny [Aloisi] had scored and a few minutes after I came off he scored again and I think Emo [Brett Emerton] added a third late on.

I was thrilled that on my full debut we won well. It was massive to play for the senior national team. It's the best it gets.

You do get overwhelmed but also you are just very proud. I remember calling my family after the game and they were incredibly proud of me too. ■

16:11:05

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Since that magical night of unbridled national pride, the Aloisi moment has regularly been voted as one of the nation's greatest ever.

Aloisi later revealed he'd practised five penalties the previous day and each to the same side. So, going into the Socceroos' final 2006 FIFA World Cup qualifier against Uruguay at Stadium Australia, he was confident. But no doubt, the weight of history was on his shoulders as he strode up and took the spot kick to beat Fabian Carini and send Australia through to its first FIFA World Cup since 1974.

The emotional outpouring that transpired is the stuff of legend. Strangers hugging strangers and all-night parties.

The goal wasn't just back and front page news – it was the only news. TV's continuous loop replayed the goal, fans celebrating, the goal, fans celebrating, the goal... you couldn't hide from the Socceroos.

The game was mentioned in Federal Parliament the next day, talk-back radio ran hot and the fans – hoarse from a long, emotional night – turned out in droves to see the players in the city before they flew back to their European clubs.

Not long after, they even dug up the piece of ground from which Aloisi blasted his left foot penalty to join other memorabilia as one of the nation's most treasured sporting artefacts.

Of course, it was a team effort. All the hard work was done in the first leg in Montevideo as the Socceroos scrambled to a 0-1 loss. It meant they were still in with a chance. Mark Bresciano scored in the second leg to even up the tie, Harry Kewell also came on as a first half substitute to bamboozle the visitors and the likes of Tony Vidmar, Kewell and Lucas Neill kept their cool in the shootout.

Then there was Mark Schwarzer whose amazing saves set up Aloisi's nail-biting coup de grace for a moment – and a night – that many dreamed of.

See, dreams can come true – even if you have to wait 32 years... ■

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JAPAN

A showdown with the Blue Samurai is next for the Socceroos

The Socceroos' final group game of their FIFA 2010 World Cup qualifiers is arguably the most enticing of the entire campaign.

Not only is it a classic regional showdown between the nations ranked top two in the confederation, but the Japanese have a smorgasbord of attacking, eye-catching talent certain to entertain at iconic Melbourne venue, the MCG.

Japan stars Shunsuke Nakamura, Yasuhito Endo, Keiji Tamada and Makoto Hasebe, to name just a few, are products of a terrific football development culture in Japan. It's a system which has helped the Blue Samurai qualify for the last three FIFA World Cup competitions.

Depending on results, Japan may go into this game needing at least a point to keep their South Africa 2010 campaign on track. Either way, if the game is anything like the previous occasion a Japanese team played in Melbourne – the AFC Asian Champions League goal-fest between Victory and Gamba Osaka (which ended 4-3 to the visitors) – this will be a night to remember.

The Japanese national team last played in Australia 11 years ago. At Adelaide's Hindmarsh Stadium, they comprehensively defeated the Socceroos 3-0 in a friendly. Goals to Japanese superstar Hidetoshi Nakata, and a brace to Takashi Hirano, proof that Japan was a nation going places. And just two years earlier, the Japanese had thumped Australia 4-1 in Wollongong.

Japan coach Takeshi Okada

Ironically, back in 1998 Japan were coached by Takeshi Okada, the same man set to lead them out in Melbourne later this month. Also in their line-up that day was a young Shunsuke Nakamura who came on as a 71st minute substitute for Hiroshi Nanami.

No doubt the Japanese will hope the clash at the 'G will have a similar ending. Memories of their 3-1 loss to Australia at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany are still fresh in the minds of their passionate fans not to mention their players.

It should be quite a night. ■

Socceroos v Japan June 17, in Melbourne at MCG

DANGER MAN

Shunsuke Nakamura

What a rare treat to see first-hand what Celtic fans see every week. The Japanese playmaker is one of the greats of Asian football and has become a real fan favourite with the Scottish giant.

Quite simply, he is brilliant from a set-piece with great vision for playing balls through from just behind the forward line. The former Yokohama Marinos player is also surprisingly tough for someone with such a sleek frame.

The 30-year-old has blazed a trail for other Japanese players to succeed in Europe, having also played for Reggina in Italy before his move to the SPL heavyweight in 2005.

Nakamura, from southern Tokyo, was also the first Japanese player to score in the European Champions League and continues to be one of Gordon Strachan's first-choice players alongside Aussie Scott McDonald.

MATCH SCHEDULE

ROUND FOUR

FIFA WORLD CUP: THE QUALIFIERS

June is the month that decides the fate of both AFC group qualifiers with the top two and third place play-off spots on the line as excitement reaches fever pitch...

GROUP A

Australia and Japan have been the dominant force, as expected, with both in the top two spots pretty much from day one. The battle for third between Bahrain and Uzbekistan will be fierce.

MATCHES LEFT TO PLAY

Tonight *Bye: Uzbekistan*
Australia v Bahrain
Japan v Qatar

FINAL GROUP MATCHES

June 17 *Bye: Qatar*
Australia v Japan
Bahrain v Uzbekistan

AUSTRALIA

[illegible] qualification for the 2010 FIFA [illegible] capped up dependin[illegible] in Doha. Following tonight's game with Bahrain is a ma[illegible] fixture against Japan at the MCG on June

BAHRAIN

A huge month for Bahrain with the Socceroos tonight then the big one – home to Uzbekistan on June 17 in a fixture that's likely to settle the all-important third spot in the group.

JAPAN

Japan hits the road this month away in Tashkent on June 6 and away to Qatar on June 10 before the heavyweight clash in Melbourne. Like Australia, Japan has three games in Super June.

QATAR

It doesn't get any easier for the Maroons with the Socceroos at home on June 6 and Japan in Yokohama tonight followed by a bye on the final match day. That's a tough end to the group for Qatar.

GROUP B

With Korea Republic looking good for top spot, second-placed DPR Korea have the resurgent Saudi Arabia breathing down their necks for the automatic qualification spot.

MATCHES LEFT TO PLAY:

Tonight *Bye: DPR Korea*
Iran v UAE
Korea Republic v Saudi Arabia

FINAL GROUP MATCHES:

June 17 *Bye: UAE*
Saudi Arabia v DPR Korea
Korea Republic v Iran

KOREA REPUBLIC

Three games in June gives the talented South Koreans ample opportunity to wrap up top spot particularly with an easy game in the UAE (June 6), followed by two home ties against Iran and the Saudis.

DPR KOREA

All eyes will be on their final game on June 17 against Saudi Arabia. It could be the game that decides second spot in the group. On June 6 they're at home to Iran followed by a bye tonight.

SAUDI ARABIA

What a tough month for the Saudis. A bye on June 6 is followed by two huge clashes: away to Korea Republic then home to DPR Korea in a game that could decide the crucial spots in second and third..

UZBEKISTAN

The home game against Japan on June 6 will be key but after a bye on June 10 all attention focuses on the Uzbeks' crunch away tie in Bahrain on the 17th. That could be the decider for third place.

IR IRAN

Nine points on offer for the troubled Iranians so they are certainly not out of the reckoning. Two ties away in DPR Korea (June 6) and Korea Republic (June 17), and a home tie with struggling UAE tonight.

UAE

They're only playing for pride now after a disappointing campaign. UAE have a bye on the final day on June 17, so tonight in Iran is their final game in the group. On June 6 they hosted top group side Korea Republic.

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SHOOT SCORE

Test your friends or quietly exercise your grey matter. No prizes, just a bit of fun!

1. Name the A-League club that has signed Socceroo midfielder Jason Culina for the upcoming A-League season?
2. Does Socceroo defender Jade North play in the J-League or the K-League?
3. How old is Socceroo superstar Harry Kewell?
4. What was the score the last time Australia played Bahrain (November 2008)?
5. Name the Socceroos' scorer(s) on that day?
6. True or false: Socceroo midfielder and Blackburn Rovers star Brett Emerton once played in the Dutch Eredivisie?
7. Which A-League club did Socceroo striker Bruce Djite used to play for?
8. Which English Championship club was Socceroo David Carney on loan to last season?
9. True or false: Socceroo Scott McDonald was once on the books of English club Southend?
10. Who will Sydney FC play in their first game of the upcoming A-League season?
11. Name Sydney's new coach? (An extra point for correct spelling!)
12. How many times has Melbourne Victory won the A-League Grand Final?
13. Name the country of origin of Bahrain striker Jaycee John?
14. Which nation knocked Bahrain out of contention for the 2006 FIFA World Cup? A clue: former Sydney FC player Dwight Yorke hails from this country
15. Who scored for Bahrain in their 1-0 FIFA World Cup qualifier win over Qatar in April?

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SOCCEROO THROUGH AND THROUGH...

Ben Campton uses his head

Mitch & Ben Campton

Aidan Ormond meets two brothers with one Socceroo passion

What was the first Socceroo match you each went to?

BEN I went with Dad to Australia versus Sweden in 1996. Before that, I never even knew Australia had a team.

MITCH Australia versus New Zealand in 1997, it was a World Cup qualifier at Parramatta Stadium. Being just nine at the time, I didn't understand much about the world game outside the mini-fields. But Ned Zelic scored a cracker – my first memory of a Socceroo goal.

Describe your greatest Socceroo moment?

BEN November 16, 2005. That date will be remembered until I die. There was so much emotion. Thirty-two years disappeared as soon as John Aloisi's kick went in. It was insane. People everywhere were hugging and celebrating with random strangers and there were heaps of people with tears in their eyes, including me. I had friends and family tell me how excited they were after the game, people who were never interested in football before.

MITCH Same as me. The country united in celebration. Football's presence was stamped firmly into this country with that kick.

Could you tell us about your Germany 2006 memories?

BEN A two-week carnival with people from every pocket of the globe, who put aside all their differences and just enjoyed the sport. Football is a powerful tool for breaking down barriers and this World Cup proved it.

MITCH Cahill scoring the first Aussie World Cup goal, then John Aloisi making it three. The Croatia game was a nail-biter and making it through to the round of 16 was huge. Of course, the frustration and anger of the Italy game cannot be forgotten.

Favourite Socceroo and why?

BEN They have obviously changed over the years but I really admire the players who are honest but also acknowledge the fans support. Players like Emerton, Neill, Cahill, Lazaridis and Schwarzer. Those who put the Aussie shirt first. But if I had to pick a favourite, it would be Timmy Cahill. His commitment and passion is unrivalled.

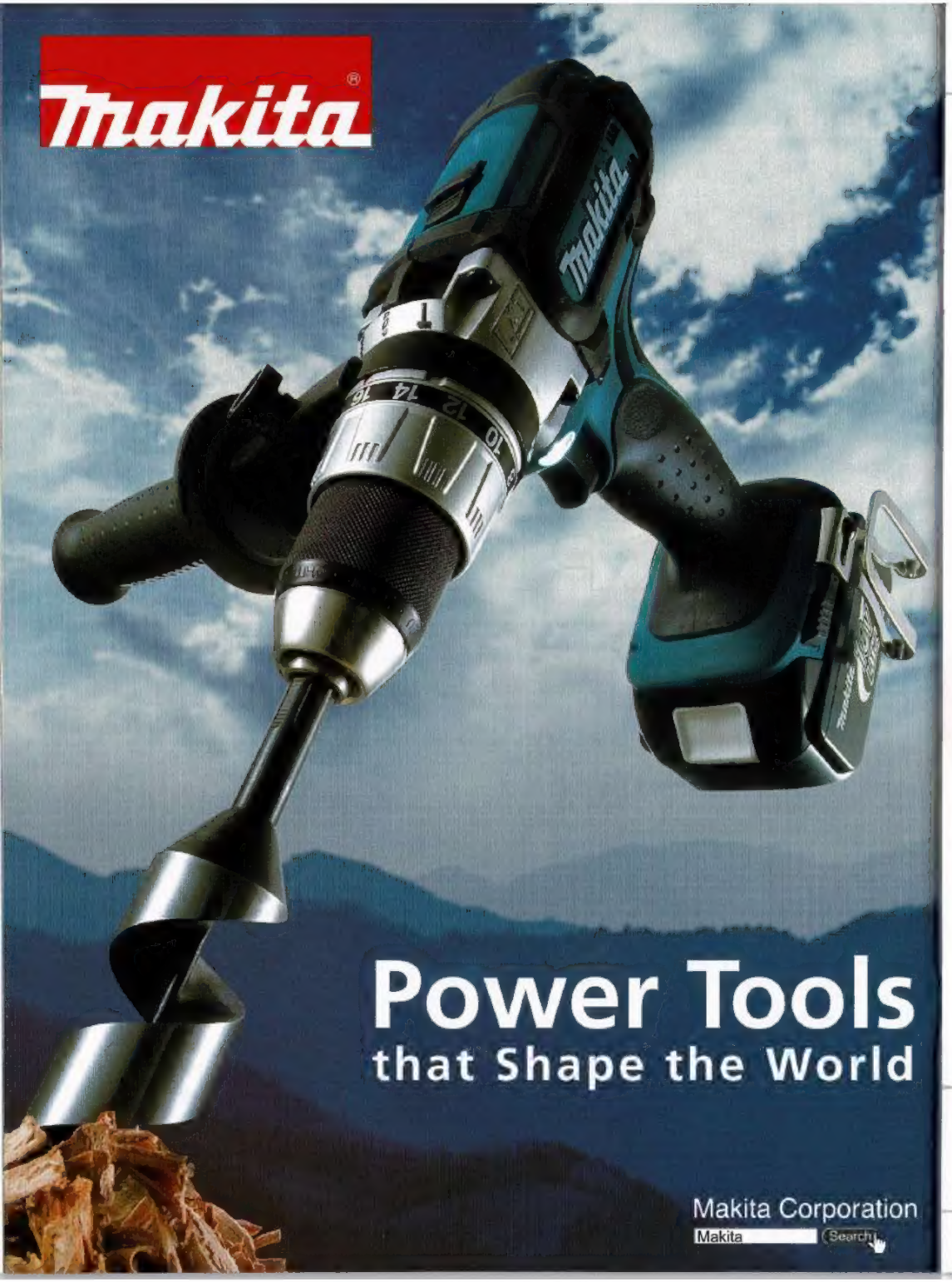
MITCH Mark Schwarzer. He saved those penalties against Uruguay for starters and he's made some pretty spectacular saves when it counts. A pure champion. We both went to China in 2008, and when he saved that penalty, it was like we'd won the match.

> "Football is a powerful tool for breaking down barriers"

In a few words, describe your passion for our lads in the green and gold.

BEN It's about pride in your team and country. These players are representing not only a football team, but Australia itself. Nothing beats singing the Aussie national anthem in places as random as Kunming, Kaiserslautern and Bangkok. I would follow the team anywhere, depending on money of course!

MITCH I've always played and supported football and to see it get more recognition is great. To see the Socceroos representing their country in so many different leagues around the world is truly inspiring. ■



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All the numbers you need to know about Australia's opponent Bahrain

670,000 Estimated population of Bahrain

19 Number of teams in Bahrain's top league before they split into two competitions

52 Number of football clubs in the country

1966 The year Bahrain joined FIFA

4078 Estimated number of registered footballers in Bahrain

17 Number of young Bahrain players travelling to London for Arsenal's International Football Festival this July

65 Age of Bahrain's coach Milan Macala

1931 The year a Bahraini national championship was first organised

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